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THE
NIGHT CLUB
MYSTERY

THE EXPERIENCES OF A
HIGHLY UNCONVENTIONAL
YOUNG MAN UNEXPECTEDLY
BROUGHT INTO CONTACT
WITH SINISTER FORCES

BY

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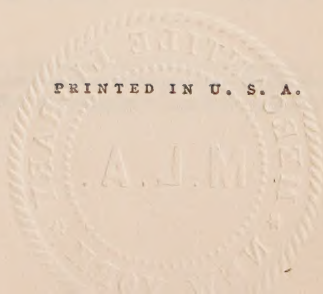
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To
M. H. C.



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CONTENTS

	PAGE
PROLOGUE	3
CHAPTER	
I BARRY SETTLES DOWN	16
II THE FIRST UPHEAVAL	34
III QUEENIE OFFERS SOME ADVICE	68
IV ENTER TONY THE CAT	89
V HENNESSY BECOMES CURIOUS	105
VI BARRY HEARS A CALL	130
VII DINK MAKES A LOAN	150
VIII WHAT UNCLE ALFRED KNEW	163
IX THE ENGAGING NANCY	183
X MANTELL TAKES A HAND	198
XI BIG JIM BOSCO	219
XII BARRY HAS SOME EXERCISE	240
XIII AUNT ANNE SPEAKS OUT	254
XIV IN A TOMBS CELL	266
XV BARRY TAKES A RIDE	280
XVI THE VERDICT	294
XVII J. C. BLEECKER PASSES	313

THE NIGHT CLUB MYSTERY

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PROLOGUE

THE boy was nine years old that day, and the occasion was supposed to be joyful. He had received various presents, including one for which he had frequently expressed an intense desire. He was to have a special supper and a birthday cake and something in the nature of a party. A dozen of his small friends were coming to the banquet and there were to be games afterward. Long hours, however, lay between the present and these delights, for it was not quite noon; so Barry Cabot hung over the gate in the picket fence that separated the grounds of his home from the village street and, clutching his new fishing-rod in a desperate grip, lent himself to black thoughts.

His grievance was a real one. The irony of possessing a fishing-rod with which he was not allowed to fish was poisoning his soul. Passionately but vainly the agony of this situation had been pointed out to the maiden aunt of fifty who was his guardian and the supreme authority of his world.

"But I didn't want it just to look at," he fiercely maintained. "I wanted it to fish with!"

Miss Marcia Cabot had appreciated the point. It was the redeeming feature of their life together that she could see a small boy's side of things. But to-day she had to make a point of her own.

"I know," she admitted. "And just as soon as we find some man or big boy who has time to go with you, I'll let you fish. But Swift River is a mile off, and it's very deep in spots. I suppose you've forgotten that Johnny Harris was drowned in the swimming-hole there, last summer. So there's no sense in teasing any longer—or in sniffing, either," she added sternly as a betraying sound came from the small person before her. "A big boy nine years old ought to be ashamed to cry!"

"I ain't crying," Barry furiously asserted.

"You are, too. And it won't do you any good to lie about it," his aunt assured him with uncompromising New England directness.

She watched him dash his hand across his eyes and her own eyes softened.

"You just play around now and have a nice time," she added mildly. "Perhaps to-morrow Mr. Brown or George Kerr will take you fishing. I'll arrange with one of them to do it to-day if I can get him," she ended as she walked back toward the house.

Barry knew exactly how much and how little that meant. Brown was the part-time gardener employed by his aunt, and George Kerr was wood-chopper, furnace-man, and general utility aid, working for Miss Cabot for fifty cents an hour when he did not happen to be

working for any of her neighbors. It was always hard to secure the services of either man for the actual needs of the place, and Barry remembered that more than a day's notice was usually needed. He realized, however, that either man would rather fish at hour rates than work, and a dim ray of hope penetrated the general gloom of his outlook: but to-morrow was a long way off and he wasn't sure he'd fish even then. Holding the new rod in a tighter grip, he again draped himself across the gate and stared up and down the wide old village street. Perhaps some big boy would come along. But there wasn't much chance of that. It was harvest-time and most of the big boys were working on near-by farms.

Suddenly his roving eyes focused on a figure that came swinging toward him. It was a man's figure, admirably dressed, finely carried, and wholly unfamiliar to the boy, who knew every one in the small community. Barry understood the stranger's presence. He was some city man, probably from Boston, in Wheaton on business, and on his way "up-street" to have his dinner at Wheaton's one hotel, a square away. Of course he was in a hurry. Strangers were always in a hurry; and most of their haste, the village boys had observed with surprise, was devoted to an effort to get away from the village—a feat made difficult by the schedule of Wheaton's two daily trains. One of these left early in the morning and the other late in the afternoon. Barry had listened with awe while city men expressed their opinion of the service. He thought he knew how this visitor to Wheaton felt, and he watched with inter-

est as the man drew near. To his surprise, the stranger turned in toward the gate.

"Hello, kid," the man said affably. "Is the hotel on this street?"

"No, sir. It's about a block from here, round that first corner. But they don't have dinner till half-past twelve," Barry expansively explained.

"I bet they don't," the man rejoined. He added gloomily, "I bet they don't really have it then."

"Oh yes they do," Barry corrected. "They have it from half-past twelve till two, an' it's mostly roast beef or roast pork an' apple-sauce an' apple-pie, an' it costs a dollar."

"A bargain at the price, I'm sure," the man said with restored serenity. He looked at the new rod. "Going fishing?"

"No, sir." Barry had forgotten for a blessed moment his corroding sense of injury and injustice, but now it returned. "My aunt won't let me." He added with a bitterness terrible in one so young, "No one has time to take me, and she thinks if I go alone I'll fall into the river!"

The man laughed. Then, at Barry's expression, he sobered. He realized that he was in the presence of tragedy. He took the jointed rod from the boy's hand and examined it.

"Good rod," he said admiringly. "New, isn't it?"

"Yes, sir. I just got it this morning, for my birthday. I guess Mr. Fisher, the man that sells them, helped Aunt Marcia to pick it out. She don't know nothing—

anything, I mean—" he hastily corrected, "'bout fishing-rods."

The man smiled, a singularly understanding smile. He was still handling the rod, but his eyes were on the boy's face. It was an arresting face, with a strength of feature unusual in one of such tender years; and with the most vividly blue eyes set in it the man had ever seen. The kid had a fine head, too, the stranger observed, covered with very thick black hair. He had a sturdy body and looked as tense, and for the moment almost as fierce, as an abused tiger cub. Again the sense of his wrongs was boiling within him.

"It's pretty hard luck," the passer-by condoled, "to have a new fishing-rod and a birthday and not be able to fish—especially on a day like this. It's just the right weather for fishing," he added, glancing at the overclouded sun.

The boy nodded and his lips set. This was sympathy and in its presence he was for a moment beyond further speech. But at last he found words.

"Yes, I told Aunt Marcia that. I *told* her," he passionately repeated. "And there's lots and lots of fish up in Swift River. I could have brought home a big string for supper. But Aunt Marcia won't let me go alone, and no one," he added without hope, "has time to go with me."

"I might have time," said the new-comer, his eyes still on the boy's face. "Think I'd do?" he asked, and saw the vivid face flash into flame.

"Oh-h-h!" Barry gasped.

That was all, but it was enough. The man pushed open the gate from which the boy had slipped down in his excitement.

"We'll see what Aunt Marcia says," the godlike being suggested, striding along the flagged path that led to the front door of the Colonial house and looking approvingly at borders of old-fashioned flowers as he went. At the left there was a garden with a glimpse of bird-baths, bird-houses, and rustic benches under elms and maples that seemed to have stood guard over the house for centuries.

"Nice old place," the man murmured. He was deliberately loitering now to look around him.

"I guess," Barry restively prompted, "we'll go to the kitchen door. Aunt Marcia's always in the kitchen in the morning."

"I've got a better idea," his new friend told him. "Suppose I wait in the garden and you go in and ask Aunt Marcia to come out there. I haven't seen a garden like this for a long time," he threw over his shoulder as he made for the nearest rustic bench. Barry saw him sit down on it and remove his Panama hat. Then he himself hustled excitedly into the house and, as soon as he had stammered out his message, was shot upstairs to wash his hands and clean up generally while his aunt looked into the matter of the stranger's credentials. Through the window of the second-floor bathroom, he saw her go out to the garden, saw the man rise bareheaded to greet her, saw them after a moment or two sit down on the bench. What they said he could not, of course, overhear, but a little later

he heard Aunt Marcia give a brief synopsis of it to Praisever Reed, for twenty years her maid of all work.

"His name's Bleecker, J. C. Bleecker, and he came here this morning on business," she explained. "He's been to Judge Cummings's office and completed his business, and now he can't get away till the six-fifteen train. I telephoned to the judge and he says that, as far as he knows, Mr. J. C. Bleecker is all right—that he brought him some good letters. I suppose time is heavy on his hands, and I'm glad enough to have him take that child fishing if he's a mind to. He wanted to go back to the hotel and get a lunch-box but I told him I thought you and I could put up a better lunch than the Wheaton House, any day. So we'll give them plenty of sandwiches and hard-boiled eggs and cold chicken and watermelon pickles and that fresh apple-pie and some of the cookies we made for Barry's birthday. And we'll fill one thermos bottle with coffee for Mr. Bleecker and the other with milk for Barry and I think they'll make out."

Barry's great adventure really began with that lunch, for he and his new friend ate it as soon as the local trolley car had dropped them near the proper willow-shaded nook on Swift River. It was clear that this amazing stranger appreciated Wheaton's best fishing-grounds, even if he didn't like Wheaton itself. It was here, however, that he made the first of various remarks which the ecstatic youngster with him could not wholly follow.

"Never let them convince you, old man," he told the boy as they finished their apple-pie, "that virtue is only

its own reward. It has others. If I hadn't followed my altruistic impulse to take you fishing, I'd have been, at this very minute, forcing a Wheaton House meal into my outraged stomach instead of giving it this banquet fit for the gods."

Barry gathered that the stranger liked the luncheon, and he grinned rapturously. The boy's mouth and heart were too full for reply. He was slightly confused then and later by words which sounded all right but didn't mean much; but when the question of rods and tackle and bait came up, his companion was both intelligible and efficient.

"Could we, do you s'pose, take off our shoes and stockings?" Barry ventured. The day was extremely sultry and even in that relatively cool spot his face and that of his companion were moist with perspiration. The clear brook water with pebbles shining up at them from its depths looked very cool. The stranger nodded.

"You'd better," he agreed. "I guess I won't. But you may have to wade—and play your trout!"

It was wonderful how J. C. Bleecker understood what one meant, without many words. Praisever had to be told things over and over. Some of the boys were almost as slow. Even Aunt Marcia didn't always catch on as quickly as her small nephew expected her to. But J. C. Bleecker . . .

J. C. lay on the ground, smoking, while Barry got off his shoes and stockings. The little boy's feet were very brown. So were his legs, as far as the knees.

Above that they were white. J. C. surveyed them with interest.

"Your aunt lets you run around with bare feet a good deal, doesn't she?"

"Yes, sir." Barry was turning his stockings inside out and tucking the toes in ready to put on again, with a care that made his companion grin. "I didn't do it to-day, 'cause it's my birthday. Aunt Marcia lets me do lots of things I want to do," he added loyally. "'Course she can't let me do all of them, 'cause she feels responsible to my dead father and mother."

He brought out this statement very solemnly in the tone of one who often heard it, and the listener's expression softened again.

They had a wonderful afternoon. They did not talk much after the business of the day really began. Fish, Barry learned, object to conversation, even of the most interesting kind. When the boy had been well instructed and had started to pull in his fish, his companion took a little nap under one of the old willows that overhung the river. But later, while they were cleaning the catch, the man got a fairly accurate picture of the boy's home life and problems.

"It's pretty tough for a youngster like you to be brought up by an old maid," he absently reflected aloud; and, hurriedly preparing to soften the speech, was reassured by Barry's casual response.

"That's what Aunt Marcia says."

"I'm glad she sees it," his companion murmured as he selected another brook-trout for cleaning.

"She sees lots of things," the boy testified. "The only thing she just simply can't see," he gloomily added, "is that sometimes boys have to fight."

"You bet they do!"

Barry's face shone again, then grew as seriously thoughtful as that of a man of twenty-five.

"I'm 'fraid Aunt Marcia will never think so," he sighed.

"I guess you'll have to have a straight talk with her some day," J. C. Bleecker advised. "You'll have to tell her, very respectfully of course, that boys must decide some things for themselves. Make her see that there are boys in every school that simply have to be licked."

"Yes, sir," Barry agreed. He added virtuously: "I've licked two in our school, already. But it made Aunt Marcia feel terrible."

"I'll bet it made the two boys feel worse." The man was smiling his understanding smile and Barry's soul expanded in this atmosphere of perfect companionship.

While they were stringing the fish—there was the big string Barry had dreamed of, and he had now learned, he was sure, absolutely all there was to know about fishing—his companion recurred to the subject of fighting.

"You don't fight just for the fun of it, do you?" he asked.

"No, sir!" Barry was shocked by the suggestion. He added sedately, "I don't think it's very much fun."

"The general idea is this," Bleecker went on as he deftly worked over the fish. "If you fight at all, you

fight for good reasons and you fight fair. You don't fight little chaps. You fight a fellow as big as you are or bigger; and you fight him if he's been bullying you or interfering with your rights or the rights of smaller boys or girls. Is that the way you look at it?"

"Yes, sir." Barry had never really thought the thing out, but it sounded all right.

"You might put it that way to Aunt Marcia when you have your talk. Know anything about the rules of fighting?"

"Yes, sir. You don't hit him under his belt or gouge his eyes, and you fight till you or the other fellow says, 'Nuff.'"

The man smiled approval.

"That will do as a working basis," he conceded. "Fighting will help to keep you fit, too—healthy, in good condition. Tell Aunt Marcia that. She'll realize the importance of it."

If Barry had had a father—which he hadn't had since he was a baby—he'd have liked him to be exactly like this man. To look like him, too. The man had brown hair and brown eyes and very white teeth and he wore light-brown clothes and brown shoes and a white shirt with tiny brown stripes and a small brown four-in-hand tie with flecks of dark green and gold in it. His brown socks were silk. Barry took in these details without realizing that he was doing so. He was going to tell the other fellows about this man, and he had never seen any man dressed like that before. The man had no beard or mustache and his face was rather pale. When he wasn't smiling, his expression was very

serious. Barry decided that folks minded him when he spoke.

Suddenly J. C. Bleecker took out his watch and looked at it. Barry thought they had been fishing about half an hour and even Bleecker was surprised to discover how late it was.

"By Jove!" he cried. "We'll have to be going if I'm to get that train. And you say you've got a birthday party on, too."

"I wish you'd stay and come to my party," Barry said wistfully. His heart contracted at the thought of losing this friend. But the friend shook his head and rose. Barry was impressed with his extraordinary neatness. The lunch-basket was carefully repacked. All the scraps and papers were gathered up and disposed of. Hands had been well scrubbed in the rushing stream—a detail which Barry, left to himself, might have overlooked.

"I've got to go back to the hotel and get my suitcase," J. C. Bleecker explained. "So I'll leave you at your door."

Both were rather silent on the way home—the man because he was now thinking of the business he had transacted that day, and the boy because he felt suddenly lonely and depressed.

"I wish you lived here," Barry said at last.

His companion understood. He always understood. That was the nicest thing about J. C. Bleecker.

"I can't say I share that wish, old chap," he admitted. "But I hope we'll meet again some day. Perhaps we shall. Good-by." He held out his hand as to a pal.

"I've had an awfully good time," the boy faltered. "I . . . I'll *never* forget it. *Thank* you for taking me fishing."

"That's all right. I've had a good time, too. Good luck, old man."

It was growing dark. A wind had risen and the sun was sinking luridly behind some heavy storm-clouds. The two companions looked at each other through a spectral light. A rumble of distant thunder came to them and a sudden blinding streak of lightning zig-zagged across the sky. It was all, in a strange way, prophetic of what was to come, and both recalled it long afterward. They were to meet again and were eventually to pass together the most tragic hours of J. C. Bleeker's life. In this hour, however, no foreboding touched them. The man waved his hand and hurried off to escape the rainfall that was just beginning. The boy, looking very small and forlorn in the gathering storm, stood by the gate, staring after the disappearing figure as long as he could see it.

CHAPTER I

BARRY SETTLES DOWN

IT MUST be admitted in the beginning that Barry Cabot was an unusually conventional young man. He had every excuse for being conventional. For one thing, he had been "brought up" by a New England maiden aunt, and though at the age of nine he had repudiated her too feminine influence, and had quietly and steadily fought against it until she died during his senior year at Harvard, it had nevertheless enveloped him like an atmosphere throughout that period.

Marcia Cabot had been a spinster of intelligence and character. When her only brother's orphan infant was left in her care, she accepted the responsibility willingly but humbly.

"I'm not fit to bring up a boy," she confessed, looking down apprehensively at the lusty six-months-old youngster energetically kicking in his new crib after his journey to her. "You'll have to stay at least five years," she told the nurse who had brought him. "What do I know about babies or boys?"

She learned something about boys before she got through with Barry; and in the interval, though she kept her eyes open, she found no one for whose faith

and judgment in the matter of training small boys she had more respect than her own. Even her lifelong friend and counselor, Colonel Jessup, was too lax in his ideas to offer her much help. She gave Barry love and justice, and the child who can count on those things is not badly off, however radically he and his guardian may differ concerning such matters as personal neatness, good manners, and fights with other boys.

"Every day, on my knees, I ask God's help in guiding you, Barry," she told him on the occasion of his first serious revolt, which occurred the morning following his ninth birthday.

"I hope He will help you, Aunt Marcia," Barry earnestly responded. "He can help a lot if He only will. You see," he pointed out respectfully but firmly, "you're a woman, and God and me are men. I guess He knows boys have to decide lots of things for themselves."

That virtually ended the long argument, Aunt Marcia being, as already mentioned, a just woman, as well as one who knew when she was beaten. It also led to the establishment of a compromise fair to both sides. Barry agreed to be reasonably clean and careful of his clothes, reasonably good-mannered, reasonably punctual at meals and school, and reasonably studious. Justice could ask no more than this; and in return he demanded and obtained the privilege of choosing his own friends, though he did not put it that way, of playing with whom he pleased from the close of school up till supper-time, and of pasting any kid in the eye when and if, in Barry's best judgment, that kid needed such discipline.

Aunt Marcia conceded this final point with extreme reluctance and stated that the privilege would be withdrawn if abused. But she had to admit that on the whole her nephew did not abuse it. Only twice did he exercise it during the school year that followed. In one instance his opponent was the bully of his class, and in the other no less an authority than Barry's teacher admitted that in chastising Sammy Polinski, Barry had accomplished something in the nature of a public service.

Thus, on the whole, the compromise worked out satisfactorily; but it helps to explain why Barry Cabot grew up with habits of extreme personal neatness, with excellent manners, and with other characteristics which were severely criticized by many of his youthful associates. Cabot always hung up his cap and overcoat and knew where his books and rubbers were. He said "please" and "thank you" and had nice table manners at home and in the homes of his friends—such nice manners, indeed, that one Bob Dillon, weary of hearing Barry's praises sung by his mother, and of invidious comparisons made after he had misguidedly brought Cabot home to the midday dinner, later developed an argument with his guest which led to discipline and a black eye and swollen nose for Dillon. The argument took place in strict privacy, behind the Dillons' barn, and no grown-up knew anything about it except Dillon's mother, who was subsequently assured that her son had unseeingly run into the open barn door.

"You see, it wasn't a fight," Barry pointed out to his victim. "It was jus' a discussion." And when Barry reached home he crept up the back stairs to his own

room, made the necessary changes in his appearance, and came down to supper looking so clean and noble and uplifted that Aunt Marcia's heart turned to water as she gazed at him. Then he spoiled everything.

"I had a fight with Bob Dillon to-day," he brought out. "I guess it was kind of breaking our 'greement, 'cause I didn't have a very good reason for fighting. Bob said I was too p'lite at the table, and I made him say I wasn't."

"That isn't a good reason for a fight," Aunt Marcia ruled. "It was plain bullying." But she spoke without excitement, for Barry was eleven now and she had learned that she could trust him.

Her nephew considered her charge and nodded. He was nothing if not open-minded.

"I was 'fraid it wasn't," he agreed. "That's why I told you." He added with unction as he began his supper: "But it was a dandy fight, just the same. I blacked his eye and smashed his nose 'most flat. You oughta seen the claret run!"

"Barry!"

"He didn't mind," Barry assured her as he neatly buttered a hot biscuit. "Anyway, he said afterward that he didn't. I guess p'raps he minded a little while I was doin' it," he contentedly added.

But the influence of Aunt Marcia, and the atmosphere of the comfortable old house they occupied together, and the quiet New England town of Wheaton, and the conservative neighbors who dropped in for games of bridge in the evenings, and the occasional week-end visits of Colonel Jessup, on from New York, all had

their part in steadying Barry. Possibly Janet Perry may have helped a little, though this never occurred to either of them. She was a child three years younger than Barry who lived in the house next to his, and her situation was so like his own that the two children frequently marveled over it.

Janet, like Barry, lived alone with an aunt and one old servant, and she had even more personal freedom than the boy had. At the time of Barry's fight with Bob she was a girl of eight, not very pretty and with what Barry privately described to Aunt Marcia as a "kind of a windmilly look" of waving arms and legs. He played with her condescendingly on the occasions when none of his pals showed up, and he was impressed with her pluck and her ability as a tree-climber. Aunt Marcia liked Janet, but she did not wholly approve of Janet's aunt, whose name was Mrs. Perry, and who, Aunt Marcia had been told, was the wife of the dead brother of Janet's father.

Mrs. Perry, according to Miss Cabot, was no housekeeper; and that, even Barry knew, is almost the gravest charge one New England woman can bring against another. Mrs. Perry left all the housework to her one servant, whereas in the Perry house there was plenty of work to keep two women busy, as there was in the Cabot house. Moreover, Miss Cabot resented the Perry garden with its flaunting, triumphant air of neglect. Her own beautiful garden was always in perfect condition and she worked in it hours every day. Mrs. Perry spent most of her time in reading novels, which she got from Wheaton's circulating library or had sent

her from Boston. Her neglect of "that poor child," Aunt Marcia maintained, was appalling.

Barry listened to these comments with puzzled interest. He knew that Janet was well fed, reasonably well clothed, warm in winter and cool in summer, and that Mrs. Perry was free from the notions about trifles that afflicted Aunt Marcia. Janet's time was her own, and in his opinion that was an ideal situation. Also, Janet was singularly fortunate in that she had a father, though it appeared that she never saw him. He lived in South America and built railroads and bridges. He wrote Janet occasionally and always sent her presents on her birthday and at Christmas-time. The presents were very much the same—Spanish-lace scarfs and embroidered shawls and such stuff. Janet had trunks full of shawls and scarfs. They seemed to be the only presents her father knew anything about; or perhaps they were the only things he could get in wild places where he worked. These wild places had names like Lima and Valparaiso and Buenos Aires, which Barry knew, from his geography lessons, were cities. At least, Mr. Perry's letters came from there. But perhaps he sent them over the mountains on mules.

Barry did not envy Janet her father as much as he envied his boy friends these agreeable appendages to their lives. A slight resentment against his own father for getting killed and going to heaven instead of staying on earth with his son, and against his mother for starting for heaven as soon as Barry was born, had passed away with the establishment of his personal independence, at nine. He never forgot that he owed his

victory over Aunt Marcia to J. C. Bleecker, and for years he dreamed of that dazzling figure of the outer world and hoped that it would some day pass his way again. In the meantime he cherished its memory and unconsciously lived his life according to a code which he hoped J. C. Bleecker would have approved.

Barry and Janet frequently played games in which Janet impersonated her father and Barry took the more spirited rôle of J. C. Bleecker. At these times Mr. Perry was always in situations of extreme personal danger from which the skill and resourcefulness of J. C. Bleecker invariably rescued him. Janet's occasional suggestion that her father be allowed to rescue J. C. Bleecker was passed over with scorn. J. C. Bleecker, Barry made clear to his playmate, was a superman, needing no help from ordinary mortals. Once, in a reckless moment, Janet complained that she was tired of J. C. Bleecker, but Barry's wrath was so terrible that she never confessed this again; and only the next day J. C.'s rescue of her helpless father was so dashing that Janet humbly admitted the superman's superiority over all others.

As he grew older Barry frequently asked himself what J. C. Bleecker would have said and done in this or that crisis confronting the boy; and on one occasion, when the crisis seemed really vital, Barry even called on Judge Cummings in the hope of getting Mr. Bleecker's address and writing to him. Barry was fifteen now and there seemed no reason why he should not do this.

But Judge Cummings was disappointing. He had not

had a letter from Bleecker for almost five years and that—the judge was good enough to look over his files, as Barry was a friend of his—was written in a New York hotel which was doubtless merely Bleecker's temporary stopping-place. Barry let the matter drop; but the memory of Bleecker never fell into that pool of oblivion into which so many childish episodes, important at the time, are tossed. Bleecker had given him the supreme day of his childhood. For years Barry dreamed of it, sometimes as often as twice a month; and though later he fished in many places and with many different companions, he never lost the conviction that J. C. Bleecker had given him the best fishing of his life.

Janet Perry had come to live in Wheaton when she was six. By the time Barry left for college, which was when he was seventeen, she had improved a great deal. She was dressing better, for one thing, and, in the words of Aunt Marcia, was exercising "a more refining feminine influence" on Barry. If she was, Barry did not know it. He was devoted to Janet, as devoted as if she had been his sister, but he hadn't much time to think about her or other girls. He was very busy getting ready for college, and the years and Aunt Marcia and the persistent influence of J. C. Bleecker had shaken him down into the conservative youth most of the Cabots had been. He meant to be a man, a regular man of the J. C. Bleecker type. That meant being a strong, steady, rather quiet, and very successful man.

Barry was already steady enough to satisfy even Aunt Marcia Cabot. He had decided to be a banker and a financier. He was helping Aunt Marcia in the

matter of her investments, though his help consisted in keeping her accounts and in leaving her investments where they were—in safe, gilt-edged stocks and bonds. No wildcat schemes or get-rich-quick notions for Barry Cabot. Wheaton's leading men thought well of him. Any one of them would have been glad to advise the boy, and not one suspected that he himself had been tried by the acid test of mental comparison with J. C. Bleeker and found wanting. Barry asked no help from any man except one or two of his favorite professors at Cambridge. The memory of J. C. Bleeker was still like a hand on his shoulder.

During his senior year at Harvard, Marcia Cabot—indomitable of soul, as incessantly active and swift-stepping of body as her ancestors had been, and with every apparent chance of living eighty or ninety years as they had done—suffered a stroke and died in forty-eight hours. Barry was with her, but she did not know it; and he hardly knew her in the unconscious human mass that lay so stiff and straight in her great four-poster. What he did know was what she had been to him and how tightly, despite his independence, he had clung to that last family tie.

During a day and night when Marcia Cabot's fighting heart continued to beat, despite the assertion of her doctors that it could work only a few hours at the most and might cease at any moment, Janet remained with Barry in the sick-room. She had been a tower of strength through the entire ordeal, and even her aunt, Mrs. Perry, had revealed unsuspected powers of sympathy and helpfulness. But it was Janet more than the

nurses who smoothed the way for the dying woman; and Barry never forgot the hours in which he and Janet sat in the big, strangely silent room, watching Marcia Cabot's face fall first into the peaceful lines of deeper unconsciousness and finally into the majestic repose of death.

It was Janet who took the boy's arm and led him from the room where he still sat crouched forward in his chair, staring at the bed and trying to take in what had happened. He had never seen death before—and it is an awesome thing to see. It was Janet and Mrs. Perry who helped him with the final arrangements; and it was they two, with Colonel Jessup, on from New York to attend the funeral of his old friend, who sat in the Cabot pew with Barry and listened to the minister's tribute to Wheaton's first lady. Marcia Cabot had been just that, and every one in Wheaton knew it; but few in the crowded church had realized, till the minister told them, how great had been her helpfulness and how many her benefactions.

The Perrys had taken Barry home with them after the funeral, and Janet had been amazingly understanding that last evening, he thought, for a girl of seventeen.

"You don't know how queer it seems," the twenty-year-old boy brought out as the two sat together, after supper, before the fire in the Perry living-room, "to know there's absolutely no one in the world now that belongs to me."

"Yes I do," Janet told him. "I know because I have that feeling so much, myself. Father is always so far away, and Aunt Anne is so vague and so absorbed in

books that sometimes she hardly counts. I'm horribly lonely most of the time. Miss Cabot was my only real friend here. Now that she's gone, I shall feel worse than ever. She was always so good to me," she broke out with a little gulp. "I went to her with lots of things I couldn't talk over with Aunt Anne."

"She was father and mother, brother and sister, uncles and aunts to me," Barry said. "She was all I had. I had plans for her," he added somberly.

"Did you ever tell her about them?"

"Of course I did. We were always talking about my future. She was as much interested in it as I was," he added with simple, unconscious egotism. "I wanted her to come to New York and keep house for me when I started in for myself. I hate hotels. But she always said I'd soon get married and my wife would keep house. She said she'd keep the big place in Wheaton, so my children could spend their summers here and we could all come home for Thanksgiving . . ." Realizing that his voice was not steady, he changed the subject: "But why should you be lonesome, Jan? You must have lots of friends."

"I have some school friends, of course, scattered all over. But there aren't many girls in Wheaton and I've been away at school so much that now I hardly know even those that are here. I always played with you when I was a youngster. At least, I was either playing with you or waiting till you had time for me. You saved my life in those days, Barry."

"You've just about saved mine now," Barry assured

her. "I don't know how I'd have got through this . . . I won't try to thank you . . ."

He looked at Janet and strange new thoughts stirred in him. She was wonderfully pretty. He seemed to be taking in full consciousness of her beauty for the first time, though he had observed it during vacations. That shining reddish hair of hers was stunning, and the brown eyes and perfect skin that went with it . . . And she had a lovely mouth and the kind of smile . . . He sighed and pulled himself together. He was depressed and lonely, and Janet had stood by like a trump, and he was getting sentimental. But it was part of his present code not to be interested in girls just now. Time enough for them later. He had observed how they messed up the lives of fellows who began too soon to take them seriously.

When he said good-by to Janet, however—he was leaving on an early morning train—he took both her hands and held them.

"I can't talk about it, Jan, but I'll never forget how you've stood by," he said chokily.

The tear-filled brown eyes she turned up to him were lovely. There was a new look in her face—a soft radiance, despite those quivering lips which she was forcing to smile. . . .

"It was good of you to let me help," she said in a very low voice. "I wanted to . . . so terribly. It would have broken my heart if you had shut me out." It was she who now hastened to change the subject: "Are you really going to make your start in New York, Barry?"

"Yes. In October. Colonel Jessup is going to get me a job in some big bank. He has a lot of influence and I don't mind letting him give me a fair start. After that I want to win out by myself."

Barry spoke absently. Ordinarily her question would have started him on a monologue, but at the moment he was thinking of that new look on Jan's charming face.

"Good-by," he said. He bent and gently kissed her on each cheek. "Good-by," he repeated and hastened out of the house. It was hard to leave her, but probably that was because he so dreaded going back to his own home.

That night he lay awake for hours, trying to face life without Marcia Cabot to come home to, and thinking of Jan. Dear Jan! She was lonely—had always been lonely, she had told him—but loneliness was a new experience for Barry.

He and Janet had never kept up a vigorous correspondence. He wrote her the week of his return to college and several times after that. She always answered his letters; but when he realized that the correspondence had ceased, he was not sure which of them had dropped it.

When he was graduated from Harvard in June and came back to Wheaton to close his empty house and pay a final visit to Marcia Cabot's grave before sailing for Europe for his last long vacation, Janet and her aunt had given up the house next door and gone away. He was sorry to hear this but not excited. He was leaving Wheaton, himself. He was not excited even

when he heard that the Perrys had gone to New York, where he would see them soon. Janet, he learned, had developed a voice and wanted to study singing. Praisever told him that the Perrys had left their address with her, but she had laid it down somewhere and it had lost itself. What else could he expect, Praisever wanted to know, with strangers stalking through the house all the time, and looking at everything in it even when they had no notion of buying it?

Barry pensioned off Praisever, sold the Cabot place, kept the beautiful old furniture and had it carefully packed and stored, and then sailed for Europe. His aunt's death had still further sobered him and had crystallized his earlier determination. He had settled down into a very conventional young man indeed, as well as an extremely ambitious one. His plan was to go straight on up. He had gone straight on up at college, and had devoted so much time to that steady ascent that he had no doubt missed other things.

The articles of Barry's creed were strung on a cable of self-control. Work, he had decided, was the Big Interest, the one Best Bet. No fights, no drinking-bouts for him. No racketing, either, and not too many friendships. Friendship took a lot of time. He was intimate with three or four fellows and cordial with dozens, but they all took care not to be too pervasive. He believed in plenty of gymnasium work because it helped to keep him fit and because J. C. Bleeker had emphasized the importance of fitness. Barry had gone in for boxing, and had kept it up, mindful of the talk on that never-to-be-forgotten ninth birthday. He had not taken time

for football or for rowing—greatly to the disgust of the college coaches in these sports.

“Say, you ought to do one or the other,” one of them had barked at him. “You’re made for it. How else can you use all that bone and muscle?”

Barry thought he knew. He was a big chap, a six-footer, with superb muscles and the slender waist of a ring champion. That bone and those muscles would help him to get on and up. It was not among his plans to be bumped off by heart failure when he was in his forties. He came back from Europe, accepted a modest position in a big New York bank, and worked so hard that within two years he had his name on a brass plate in front of a small cage. It wasn’t a very important cage. There were many like it in the big bank, and many brass plates similar to his. But he was undoubtedly moving up.

In the meantime he was nothing if not methodical. He rose at seven every morning, took his setting-up exercises, and bathed and dressed with what is frequently referred to as “meticulous care.” He ate a breakfast consisting of half a grape-fruit or an orange, two boiled eggs, two slices of toast, and a small pot of coffee with a big pitcher of hot milk. He ate this breakfast three hundred and sixty-five days in the year, with the hearty approval of the one waiter in the small apartment building, who served all breakfasts to tenants in their rooms and who was greatly inconvenienced by their varying tastes. After breakfast Barry walked to his office—a matter of more than three miles—and after a luncheon consisting of a baked apple, a sand-

wich, and a glass of milk, he walked another mile and a half.

On this second excursion, as the bank was well downtown, Barry indulged himself a trifle, walking to the battery or to the river wharfs or to the regions of the big public markets, to study local settings and types. He was interested in types and sure that all he learned about them would be useful later. Sometimes he forgot types, in an unexpected thrill over the life and color around him. There was often beauty, too, of a sort, and there were suggestions of foreign skies and distant lands, touches of drama and romance, which for an instant made him thrill as the small boy in Wheaton had thrilled over things, years ago. But he forgot the thrills when he was back in the cage. All he saw there was the hill he was climbing and those who occupied it with him.

Two evenings a week he went to a gymnasium, to keep up his boxing. Once a week, on Saturday night, he went to a theater or to the opera. On other evenings he remained in his sitting-room, reading and studying. Except on Saturday nights he was in bed and asleep by eleven o'clock. On Saturdays it was often midnight and he made up for this with an hour's additional sleep on Sunday morning. He spent Saturday afternoons in wandering about the city, and on Sunday went to the country. Frequently he was invited to pass Sunday with some friend who had a country home; on other Sundays he merely took a train, left it when the spirit moved him, lunched at any attractive inn he found, and had a long walk in the afternoon, preferably in the

woods, getting back to New York in time to dine with Colonel Jessup, who lived alone in a big old house on Washington Square.

Every Saturday the valet in the building pressed all Barry's clothes, made up his laundry and sent it out, and opened and put away the clean clothing that had come in that morning. Barry had racks for his shoes on the inside of his closet doors, hangers for his suits and overcoats, an excellent wardrobe with shelves and drawers for his underclothing, and two rods for his ties. All the blue ties with suggestions of red or green hung together on one rod and all the gray and lavender and green ties hung on the other rod. His business suits were navy blue or cool gray. He dressed admirably and knew the kind of clothes his hair and eyes called for. His black hair owed its luster to brushing and not to brilliantine. His features were large and strong, his head was finely shaped, and his face had the reserved look of the Cabots, broken at times by the sudden wide grin of his boyhood. His lips were set a trifle too firmly.

Altogether it was a remarkable life the young man lived. No clock could have beaten it in regularity. In one way it seemed a pity when, with little or no preparation, he was shot out of it—at first with a suddenness that surprised him and later with a violence that appalled him. The change was almost as cataclysmic as if he had been a passenger on a ship that was torpedoed without warning. He did not see the white line made by the speeding torpedo as it cut toward him through the water, and perhaps this was just as well. If he had seen it coming he would undoubtedly have tried to avoid

it, and then he would have missed the most unsettling, the most incredible, the most racking, and the most important experiences of his life. That, of course, would really have been a pity; for he was a very human and lovable youth who deserved to have his troubles like the rest of us.

CHAPTER II

THE FIRST UPHEAVAL

THE first, slight upheaval was caused by the re-appearance of Janet Perry. Barry had wondered where she and her aunt were living in New York, and had looked in the city directory and the telephone book for their address. Neither contained it, and he turned disappointedly from these sources of information, feeling, however, that he had done his best. Evidently, if the Perrys were in New York they lived in a hotel or a club. Some day he'd run across them—one always did run across friends sooner or later—and of course he'd be delighted to see them again. Janet was a beauty the last time he had seen her in Wheaton.

At the thought of that night he experienced the pang of loss the memory of Marcia Cabot's death always gave him, and, not liking pangs, he fixed his thoughts on Janet. He approved of her taking combination of real auburn hair, brown eyes, and the creamy complexion that goes with such coloring. She had known how to dress, too. The swagger schools for girls she attended had shown their effect. At intervals Barry wondered restively why Janet didn't look him up. She could easily do so. His name and address were in the city directory

and in the telephone book. He finally decided that she wasn't much interested, and the thought hurt.

His address was a good one. He was in the East Fifties, just off Fifth Avenue, in a building which looked like the private home of a multimillionaire but which its owner had made over into small apartments. A wall separated its tiny front plot from that of the next house and its entrance was protected by an elaborate and ornamental iron grille. A man-servant in rather too gorgeous livery opened the door when callers rang, and the hall looked luxurious. Barry's apartment, the rear one on the second floor, consisted of a kitchenette, a bathroom, and a good-sized sitting-room with a day-bed in it that had the effect of a couch. He had turned the kitchenette into a dressing-room and he kept his chests and clothes there. His sitting-room was handsomely furnished and he had a private telephone, and an open fireplace in which he burned hickory logs. This accommodation in that neighborhood cost him his entire salary at the bank, but the detail did not disturb him. He was now in control of his generous inheritance from his father and had also come into possession of Marcia Cabot's collection of stocks and bonds.

What did disturb him slightly were the persistent singing exercises and the numerous parties of a young person who occupied the front apartment of his floor. She practised scales and exercises in the morning, while he was bathing and dressing and breakfasting, and this he did not mind so much. She also sang robustly and had parties in the evening, when he was reading and studying, and this annoyed him. He did not care for

music and knew nothing about it. He wished the girl would give him an occasional night off.

Quite suddenly, one Sunday morning in the spring, after this girl had been in the house all of Barry's second winter in New York, he met her in the lower hall. He had sometimes asked himself why they did not meet there or on the staircase, but remembered that her comings and goings were at hours different from his own. Facing now a charming though somewhat overdressed young person, he discovered first that it was Janet and next, when they had clasped hands and exchanged greetings and exclaimed a while, that it was his musical and noisy neighbor.

"And you're the lad next door!" Janet was looking at him with delight in her brown eyes. "Oh Barry! Aunt Anne and I have often wondered who you were and marveled at the atmosphere of sanctity that clung around your apartment."

"They ought to have a list of tenants in the hall." Barry smiled, ignoring this tribute which did not please him. "Then we could give it the once-over and know who's here. But that's against the traditions of this place, which the agent fondly imagines are those of a private house."

"It's the worst possible taste to ask about one's neighbors," Janet confirmed. "We learned that at once. The privacy of the tenants is something the General is prepared to die for."

"The General?"

"Yes, the man down in the hall. Haven't you taken in his uniform? I hope he gets a lot of comfort out of

it," Janet went on, "for his life must be a sad one. He moves like a snail, so every one in the house is constantly finding fault with him. And he speaks so slowly that no one ever lets him finish a sentence."

Barry did not answer. He was taking in the change in Janet. She had hardened, had become too sophisticated. Moreover, her sophistication, like her painted face and her too elaborate wardrobe, suggested the stage and night clubs rather than more conservative circles. He began to understand her parties. They broke up soon after eleven and the guests trooped noisily downstairs, apparently, judging from their conversations, headed for other delights and taking their hostess with them. He recalled Aunt Marcia's grave predictions of what would happen to "that poor child" as a result of Mrs. Perry's incessant novel-reading and general neglect of her niece.

"Is Aunt Anne with you?" he asked. He was still holding Janet's hands. Now, realizing this, he let them go. Notwithstanding the changes in her, he was amazingly pleased to see her again.

"Look here," he cried eagerly, "it's Sunday and I was just on my way to the station to take a train to the country. I'll stay in town if you'll lunch with me."

"That sounds like Barry of Wheaton!" Janet laughed. "You always appreciated the value of your society to others, Big Boy."

She laughed again when the young man proceeded to be still more like Barry of Wheaton.

"I shan't have to ask Aunt Anne, too, shall I?" he inquired with an apprehensive glance toward the stair-

case. "We have so much to talk about," he added more sedately.

With a care-free wave of a hand Janet eliminated Aunt Anne.

"Of course you won't. She started a new mystery story this morning and it will hold her till night."

"Then you'll come?"

"I'll tell the world I'll come! But we can't eat yet," Janet pointed out. "It's only a couple of hours since I ate a whole omelet."

"All right. Let's take a walk in the park first. That will give us an appetite."

They walked up Fifth Avenue to the entrance of Central Park and strolled along the paths.

"The last time I saw you," Janet said suddenly, "was just after Miss Cabot's funeral."

Barry nodded. The gloom of that memory settled over him so obviously that Janet saw it fall.

"She was a good old scout," Janet hurried on, her voice softening. "Every time I needed her, she came across like a ferry-boat. Just before she had her stroke she gave me a letter to old Colonel Jessup, to use if I came to New York. I had talked that over with her. It seems the Colonel is one of New York's best and brightest now."

"Yes, and he's mighty kind to me, too. Odd he didn't tell me you were here." Barry frowned over the mystery of this.

"He doesn't know where I live now. I didn't trouble him after the first year. And of course he doesn't approve of my way of life."

"Why doesn't he? What is your way of life, Jan?"

She gave him a quick side glance.

"Not the way of guilty splendor, I assure you, so don't look so serious." She grasped the subject of Colonel Jessup as if it were a dangling line: "Colonel Jessup was very nice to me. I think he and your Aunt Marcia made the original trip in the ark together, and it must have been the one excursion of the old boy's life. Anyway, there was nothing he wouldn't do for her, so he got busy doing a daily deed of kindness for me. It was through a standing letter of reference from him that I was able to horn into this joint."

Barry frowned.

"Where the dickens did you get that line of talk?" he asked distastefully.

She uttered a little squeal of laughter which he remembered having heard frequently through their connecting wall. Janet's laugh used to be lovely, he remembered—a low, delicious gurgle that made one think of brooks.

"Barry of Wheaton again!" she cried. "It's going to be like a ride on the river to be with you, Big Boy."

He returned to his grievance.

"It's odd Colonel Jessup didn't at least tell me you were in New York," he complained. "I dine with him every Sunday night."

"He's forgotten it," Janet suggested forgivingly.

"You left Wheaton soon after Aunt Marcia died, didn't you?"

"Yes, I couldn't stand it without her and I wanted to

get to the big town. I'm really on the singing job, Barry, and I like it."

That was depressing, too, for now she talked a lot about music. But when they reached the lake and the swans and the boats, they talked of other things, principally of other days, childhood days in Wheaton. They were sitting side by side on one of the benches by that time and she glanced at him, then away.

"You're rather stunning, Big Boy," she murmured. "But, then, I always knew you would be. You're a dead ringer for Jack Buchanan in the matter of figure, but not so easy to look at, of course. Your features are too strong."

Barry remained unmoved. He had never heard of Jack Buchanan—that rare gem in London's theatrical crown.

"You've developed into a sort of fairy princess, yourself," he said, looking at her admiringly. He didn't like the painted cheeks and ears and lips, nor the Broadway vernacular, but he knew that lots of nice girls went in for them, nowadays. And despite these defects Jan was a beauty and a charmer.

"It's great to have this reunion," she went on. He was feeling that way, too. It was mighty good to be with her. They had a gay luncheon at the Casino and took another walk after it. Barry talked about himself then, and about his work. He let her see what he was heading for.

"When shall we meet again?" she asked as they parted at her door at six o'clock; and as he hesitated, she added quickly, "You're not going to let me down,

are you, now that we've got the blinders off at last?"

"Of course I'm not. But you can't play the bereft maiden with me. I've heard you and your little play-mates lift the roof, too often. However, suppose you save next Saturday evening for me. We'll dine and see a play—anything you like."

He could see that she was disappointed. A week seemed a long way off. But she left him with a casual "All right" and he strode back to his own door, whistling. It was fine to see her again, but of course he mustn't let her interfere too much with his work. Unconsciously he was already returning to the attitude of their childhood days. He'd play with her when he had nothing else to do. He thought of her that night and several times during the following day, which was doing very well for him; and he saw much more of her that spring and summer than he had expected to. For one thing, it was a hot summer—too hot for much night reading—and for another, Janet decided to stay in town up till August, as her singing teacher was going abroad then and would keep his studio open till he sailed. She and Barry often went to the beaches on hot nights.

"You ought to be in love with some nice chap by this time," Barry bromidically observed on one of these occasions.

"One!" Janet jeered. "Where would I get with one, these days?" She added complacently, "I've got one for every dress and every mood."

"How many does that make?" He was intrigued by this up-to-date position.

"Oh, five or six regulars and a few sporadics. They're harmless pups. All they ask is a saucer of milk two or three times a week—at some night club. Not one of them has the price of it, himself, of course," she added cheerfully. "You ought to meet some of them, Barry. They'd brighten you up. You're too serious."

Barry shook his head.

"Don't you risk anything of that kind," he advised. "I might get absent-minded and step on a few of them."

Later, and with the fine candor of Barry of Wheaton, he further emphasized his dislike of her new friends.

"Don't ask me to waste my time on that gang," he begged when she tried to lure him to her parties. "I'd consider it the murder of a minute to look at one of them."

She looked at him with sudden seriousness.

"You're really something of a prig, Barry," she said in the tone and manner of the Janet Perry who had come back from a good finishing school. It was one of her attractions for him that she still gave him very frequent glimpses of that Janet. She had a dual personality, and he was never sure which side she would turn to him. But the best feature of their new association was that Janet never really interfered with his work or with anything else he cared to do. She was on hand when he wanted her and out of the way when he didn't—the ideal conditions of the old days.

It became clear that she treated her "gang," as she called it, with a surprising lack of consideration. She dropped it at his slightest hint that he might have a

free evening, though she always made it clear to him that this was because she was eager for a change from the pups and lounge lizards she eliminated so informally. These, he decided later, were really harmless youths, weak and worthless but not vicious; and the girls in her group—there were only two or three of them—seemed reasonably self-respecting young persons. He got his impressions of them all from Janet's talk.

Her special chum, it appeared, was a certain Queenie Morris, head hostess of a fashionable night club known as "Jake's." Jake, a young Jew, had begun his career in a small way and had steadily mounted to the lofty peaks of established success, greatly aided by a certain famous pianiste and her husband to whom he had once been of service. According to Janet, he had won his spurs by being "square"; and Queenie Morris—the "best all-round girl" she had ever known, Janet assured Barry—had worked with Jake from the start, "with no sex stuff in their association," because neither she nor Jake was that sort. Now Queenie was sharing Jake's reward to the degree of directing his other hostesses, and drawing a big salary for doing it. Barry met Miss Morris once or twice and liked her. She was a fine and breezy type to whom every girl who knew her apparently went with her troubles.

In August, Janet left town and Barry missed her more than he had expected to. But he took his vacation late that month—went off on a Western trip with one of his old chums at Cambridge—and soon after he got back in September the person appeared who really did eventually upset his cherished routine.

It all began so simply that no young man who was stepping briskly toward the heaven of professional success and whose entire attention was given to his step could be expected to realize what was happening to him. One minute he was nodding affably to a depositor standing outside his cage, known to him only by sight, and the next instant that depositor was knocking his routine into a cocked hat.

"It's one o'clock," the gentleman pleasantly remarked, after a quick glance around which showed him there was no one else within hearing. "I've noticed that you go out to lunch at one. How about taking a bite with me?"

Barry stared. Then he smiled. The depositor, whose name was Brian Strong, seemed all right even from the constricted point of view of a young assistant teller in a cage. Brian Strong had a fine standing balance in the bank, kept his accounts in excellent shape, and asked no favors from anybody. All his deposits were in cash, and they were sizable ones. To-day's, for example, was thirty-eight thousand seven hundred dollars. Strong was sound and he looked it. There was a captain-of-industry set to his jaw and a keen look in his brown eyes that Barry admired. He was a handsome man and his white hair gave him an effect of distinction.

"I'd like to," Barry said promptly. "Give me five minutes and I'll be with you."

"I'll meet you outside, between here and Broadway."

Barry was almost excited when he closed his cash-drawer, left his cage, and heard the cage door lock behind him as he hurried into the wash-room. He hadn't

lunched with any one but Janet for several months and suddenly he wondered why. Even as he wondered he knew. He had invited no one and up till to-day no one had invited him. He realized that his bank associates thought him a bit up-stage, but the fact did not disturb him. He knew he wasn't up-stage; he simply preferred to go off by himself and roam where fancy led him. However, a change was a change and he thought well of this one, especially as Strong had interested him for months. Every time he saw the man, there was something . . . far down in his subconsciousness a faint bell had rung. . . .

"Where shall we go?" Strong asked as they walked toward lower Broadway.

"Anywhere you like. I usually drop in here," and Barry indicated a restaurant whose windows earnestly set forth the attractions of hot griddle-cakes. Strong shook his head.

"Not good enough," he ruled, as he led the way to a pretentious and famous downtown establishment.

Closeness in money matters was not one of Barry's faults, but he was somewhat dazed by the excellence of the repast his host ordered, and still more surprised by the discovery that the other's share of it consisted of two slices of whole-wheat bread and a glass of butter-milk.

"All I ever eat at noon," Strong tersely explained when Barry commented upon this Spartan repast. "To-day I'm glad of it, for I want to talk to you while you eat."

Barry was interested. This might mean anything or

nothing. But if Strong had something special on his mind, he took his time in bringing it out. With a light touch and a series of tactful questions he drew from his companion the unexciting story of the latter's life and routine. At the end of it he nodded.

"In short," he said, and smiled a smile that was suddenly and almost poignantly reminiscent, "you're about the sort of chap I expected you'd develop into. But I hope you haven't stopped fighting."

Barry was so surprised that his look became a stare. The other man held his eyes. He was still smiling.

"I remember giving you some advice about fighting, that day," he added. And then, quite suddenly, the restaurant vanished and a New England stream appeared before Barry's eyes, swift-flowing and rock-filled and overhung with willows. On its bank an absorbed man and an ecstatic small boy fished side by side.

"*By Jove!*" Barry cried. He put down his knife and fork and his eyes actually stung as he spoke. "I remember now!" As the other took this in silence, he added more quietly: "But I have never forgotten. A lonely kid doesn't forget a day or a good Samaritan like that." He voiced the thought that filled his mind. "I can't understand why I didn't recognize you at once."

J. C. Bleecker shook his head.

"I've changed a lot, old man. This white hair, for instance. And I'm a good many years older and twenty pounds lighter than I was that day. I had a long illness last year."

"But your name—" Barry began impetuously, and then stopped, flushing.

"Is Bleecker. Brian Strong's my professional name."

Barry wondered what that meant but hurried into another question.

"Why didn't you speak to me the first day you came in? Or didn't you remember me then?"

"I remembered you, all right." Bleecker spoke thoughtfully, his eyes now on a morsel of bread he was molding into a tiny sphere. "You see, as a matter of fact, I've never lost track of you. But I wasn't sure you'd remember either me or the little episode. After all, it was a long time ago. How long, by the way?" he interrupted himself to ask. "You were nine or ten at the time, weren't you?"

"Exactly nine. It was my birthday. That was part of the miracle. I was twenty-three last month, so it was fourteen years ago."

"And you had a new fishing-rod, and weren't allowed to fish with it, because your aunt was afraid you might fall into the river. She was right, at that," the speaker added reflectively. "Swift River was a turbulent little stream."

"I was always hoping you'd come back to Wheaton," Barry brought out. His luncheon was forgotten. He was still trying to realize that this was happening, and wondering why he felt like a little boy in the presence of this man. "I watched for you for years. In fact, I've never stopped watching."

Strong smiled again. His smile was more than ever a fascinating phenomenon, for his habitual expression

was almost grim. His smooth-shaven face had hardened a trifle with the years, but it was still an arresting and interesting face.

"I had an hour's business there, and a six-hour wait for a train," he reminded Barry. "I never passed that way again!"

"You gave me the biggest day of my life," Barry said after a short silence in which both had again called up the pictures of the old town, the rushing river. "I've never had another like it. It was the top note of my gamut. I used to ask myself, later on, at school and at Cambridge, when something pleasant was going on, 'Does this come up to it?' But it never did."

His companion laughed out. It was the first time Barry had heard the laugh since that far-away day, and it gave him a thrill.

"You were a grateful kid." Bleecker was still laughing and the laugh was low, musical, and full of amusement.

"I'm still grateful. There was a big aftermath to the day. I had learned a lot. You influenced my whole life. Through your advice I even threw off Aunt Marcia's gentle yoke—the very next day." The young man's strong shuttered face took on the boyish look which sometimes made observers wonder why they had thought Cabot up-stage. "I'd like most awfully to have a chance to do something for you!" he added.

"I may take you up on that, sometime."

The other was still smiling, with the mildly amused air of a man of the world interested in the emotions of youth.

"I hope you will." But Barry had no real hope that he could ever do anything for the self-sufficient and successful worldling before him. He still felt like a small boy in the presence of greatness. He was not dazzled by the quiet perfection of his companion's clothes, as he had been at nine, but there was a look in Strong's eyes and around his mouth and chin that made a fellow only half his age feel almost tongue-tied.

"Mr. Bleecker—I beg your pardon, would you rather be called Strong?"

"If you please."

That settled it. To change the magic name of J. C. Bleecker in the very hour of their reunion called for some doing, but Barry's trained mind accomplished the feat. From that moment he began to think of J. C. Bleecker as Brian Strong.

"I was going to ask where you've been all these years, Mr. Strong. Several times I've tried to get in touch with you—once through Judge Cummings."

"Did you really?" Strong seemed pleased by this and considered it smilingly. "I've been right here in New York a good deal of the time," he said then. "With occasional runs to Chicago and San Francisco and over to Europe, of course."

They talked, while subconsciously Barry tried to realize that this encounter was really taking place. At last he glanced at his watch and gave a spectacular start. Brian Strong had made him forget the bank! That had never happened before.

"This has been great," he said. "Thanks most aw-

fully. But I'll have to hustle away. I'm half an hour late as it is."

"That's a compliment, all right." His host rose, too, and simultaneously nodded to their waiter. "Trot right along," he advised Barry, as he took the check. "I'll see you again in a few days."

"Sorry to gallop like this." But after a strong hand-clasp Barry rushed off, once more the rising young banker with his feet on the road to success. His host watched him expertly winding his way in and out among the tables on the journey to the door. Even when his guest had disappeared Strong still stood gazing at the spot where he had vanished, in a reverie so profound that a prolonged and distressing bronchial cough emanating from the waiter was required to bring him back to the financial obligations of the minute.

Barry thought of Strong a great deal that afternoon and that night and the next day. During the following week he frequently recalled him again and wondered uneasily why he didn't show up. But, notwithstanding his promise, Strong did not appear for a fortnight, and then only to make a large deposit and hurry off. They had greeted each other cordially through the wires of the cage, but Barry felt very flat. It suddenly occurred to him that Strong might have found their reunion disappointing.

The theory strengthened when Strong continued to refrain from following it up. Barry was chagrined but hardly surprised. Strong was a man of the world. Undoubtedly he had hosts of friends. Why should he

bother about an unlicked cub in a bank cage? At nine, as Barry recalled it, he had been a rather decent kid. At twenty-three he was, and he knew it, developing into something of a machine—perhaps even, as Janet had suggested, into something of a prig. He had not liked that comment of hers. Probably Strong felt the prig or the machine in him, or both, and was repelled.

But Strong did not seem repelled during their second and longer meeting, which occurred a full month after the first one.

This time—one Saturday morning in late October—Strong made another deposit and finding himself alone at the assistant teller's window for a moment, threw in his likable smile.

"You have Saturday afternoon off, don't you?" he wanted to know.

"Most of it," Barry admitted with a grin of expectation.

"It's a fine day. How about letting me run you up into Westchester, in my car? We might dine at some road-house there; or, if you'd rather, we can come back to town and go to a play."

"There's nothing I'd like better. But—" Barry had decided it was time for him to show some reciprocity—"suppose you dine with me?"

"Fine. Where shall we meet?"

"Anywhere you say."

"All right. I keep my roadster at the Sheldon garage." He mentioned a street and number. "Can you meet me there at four?"

"I'll be there," and Barry felt a zest of expectation

he had not known since his school-days. There was a return of self-confidence, too. He wasn't to be thrown down, then. Even if Strong had found him disappointing the first time, he was to be given another chance.

He was at the rendezvous on the moment. So was Strong, and the roadster was ready. The car was a beauty, one of the best, and Strong handled it in a way that showed it had no secrets from him. The day was as fine in its way as the memorable fishing day of fourteen years back. Barry felt a trifle self-conscious until he met Strong's smile and heard the sigh of content with which the older man settled to his work at the wheel.

"This is great," Strong said heartily. "I'm a lonely devil and it's good of a young chap like you to bother with me."

Barry appreciated the tact of this, but he was no longer analytical. He was simply content with a satisfying companionship. He hoped to learn more about Strong to-day, but this hope was not realized. Strong spoke of cars, of railroads, of motor trips, of cabbages and kings. He also spoke of Barry Cabot and listened with a sympathetic expression to the news of Marcia Cabot's death. But of Brian Strong or J. C. Bleeker he spoke not at all. Barry did not realize this till afterward and then he did not dwell on it. They came back to town rather early and dined at the Ritz, afterward talking for an hour over their cigars.

"This your hang-out?" Strong asked the young man as he drew up about ten o'clock before the address Barry had given him.

"Yes. Won't you come in and have a cigar?"

"No, thanks, not to-night."

In his room, Barry filled his favorite pipe and sat down for quiet reflection. Janet would be disappointed. She was back in town now and looking to him to stand by. He had fallen into the the habit of taking her to dinner and the theater Saturday evenings, but perhaps it was just as well to have an occasional interruption of that routine. She could have another of those gay parties she liked and dance all night with the suitor who matched her mood and clothes. He, Barry, would take her somewhere to-morrow—perhaps to the country.

Her father, he had learned from her, was still in South America, building railroads and bridges and sending Janet photographs of them as well as more Spanish scarfs and shawls. She admitted that by this time her collection of scarfs and shawls was probably the largest in New York, but added that they came in well for Christmas gifts. She also expressed a mild wonder concerning how the other civil engineers in South America found work. Her father, she said, seemed to be building about everything that was done there. She added that he came across with plenty of cash. Despite her flippancy, Barry saw that she resented the rarity of her father's letters and his persistent absence.

"After I left school I asked him if Aunt Anne and I could take a voyage to South America and give him the once-over," she admitted. "I've always wanted to see South America. But he said white women wouldn't be safe in his part of it. He sent his New York friend to explain it all to me. His pal's a good scout. I see him

sometimes. He looks after Father's business interests here and pays me my allowance. The stars in their courses have nothing on him in punctuality, and if I need a little extra he always coughs it up."

To-night Barry's thoughts did not dwell long on Janet. It was on Strong they centered and many of them were disquieting. He had observed some puzzling things about Strong during the dinner—little idiosyncrasies he was not prepared to see in that finished product. There was no question that Strong was a man of education and breeding; and he was one of the most interesting and exciting talkers Barry had ever listened to. He had been all over the world. He evidently knew Paris, London, Berlin, Rome, and Budapest as well as he knew New York. He had a sense of humor and an amazing knowledge of human nature. Also—and to this discovery Barry's thought constantly reverted—he had a side to his nature of which the young man had caught a momentary and appalling glimpse.

It had happened at the Ritz, while they were lighting their cigars and watching the final bubbling of their black coffee in the glass percolator on the table before them. A thin, dark young man in excellent evening clothes, with colorless eyes and a hard-bitten face, had suddenly pushed his way to them through the tables, with the obvious purpose of speaking to Strong. Strong raised his glance to the new-comer's face. It was the look in Strong's eyes that Barry was recalling now, and the memory sent a chill down his spine. Never before had he seen such icy anger and—yes, there was no doubt of it—such white heat of warning as he had seen

in Strong's eyes. Under the look the thin stranger crumpled. His own eyes dropped and his whole manner became cringingly apologetic.

"Jest t'ought I'd say 'How,'" he stammered, and faded away.

The mask of Strong's face, which had been so new and terrible for a moment, changed back to the one Barry knew. He leaned forward to meet Barry's offer of a light for his cigar.

"One of the lounge lizards that go about these places hitting every one they recognize for a touch," he said contemptuously. "He'll try it on you, the next time he sees you in public, because he'll think he met you to-night."

Barry had murmured something in response and carefully refrained from looking at his guest. For one thing, he didn't care to see those eyes again just yet; and, for another, he knew Strong was lying. The man who had come to their table so confidently was no mere acquaintance. He was a menial of Strong's and he had come with a message. That look he got from Strong was the sort one does not turn on an equal. It was the look with which one calls a hound to heel; and the hound had been terribly frightened by it and had cringed flat under it.

Strong had gone on talking more entertainingly than ever, and he had taken some pains to draw Barry out. This was never a hard matter, as that future financier was rarely at a loss for words. Within ten minutes Barry was beginning to wonder if he had not exaggerated the look in Strong's eyes. Now, alone with his

pipe, he knew he hadn't. There was something queer about Strong—something back of those controlled features and that extreme reserve. Barry had felt it and had fought against it in the first moments of their reunion, and now he told himself that he knew what it was. The realization was like a plunge into ice-water, with none of the exhilaration that may follow that shock.

He was aroused by the ringing of his telephone bell. As he put the receiver to his ear Strong's voice came to him.

"Old man," it said cheerfully, "I've changed my mind about that little invitation of yours. I'm down in your front hall, and if you haven't gone to bed I'll come up and smoke a cigar."

"Come right along," Barry said heartily. "I'll be delighted."

He understood what that meant. He had been sitting in the firelight and his guest was knocking at the door almost before he could flash on the lights. Strong breezed in, looking eager and amazingly vital. He tossed his hat and overcoat on the couch and hastened toward the fire, but he did not take the easy-chair Barry was pushing toward him.

"I'll prowls about a bit, if you don't mind," he said. "Jolly quarters you've got here."

He took a cigar from the box Barry offered him and also accepted the whisky and soda his host hastened to mix. With the glass in one hand and the unlit cigar gripped firmly in a corner of his mouth—the latter one of the peculiarities the young man had observed during

their first lunch together—he roamed about the room, stopping occasionally to take a book from the shelf, replace it after a glance, or look at a picture. Barry watched him thoughtfully. He knew exactly why the man was here and why the man was nervous, and his own heart was heavy. Suddenly Strong stopped directly in front of his chair, swung another chair forward, and sat down in it facing him.

"I've got to make a clean breast of it," he began, and his stern face twisted into an almost deprecating smile. "I didn't want to do it just yet," he went on. "I wanted you to know me better first. But of course it wouldn't have been a square deal."

Barry waited. He would have saved the man this bad fifteen minutes if he could, but of course he couldn't. Strong, who had set his drink on a table beside him, now lighted his cigar and took a puff.

"Perhaps you know already," he said suddenly.

"No one has told me anything, if that's what you mean."

"Then I'll do it, myself. Hope it won't make any difference, but perhaps it will. If it does, I'll understand. You see, you're a young pillar of society, in a way, and I . . . well, I'm outside that sacred fold. So perhaps I shouldn't have looked you up."

The words were the most felicitous he could have chosen. Again before Barry's eyes swung the picture of the old river, the willows, the two sportsmen of long ago.

"Cards, I suppose," he suggested. Now that it was out, he could help.

"Yes, a gentleman's game—a square game. Any one you ask will tell you that."

"I'd be sure of it without being told."

"That's mighty good of you, old man."

Evidently the admission both touched and encouraged his companion.

"Then perhaps you'll believe, too," Strong went on, "that I'm not horning into your life with any idea of drawing you into mine. What I want," he added with a sigh, "is to get away from my own occasionally, if you know what I mean." For a moment the man's face was tragic. It was as if a guard had dropped, revealing his lonely soul.

"I think I do. You want some hours off, once in a while."

The other caught him up:

"That's exactly it. But I'm not engaged in leading youth astray and I'd do a final disappearing act right now if I thought it would hurt you socially or professionally to be seen round with me at long intervals. I can't see why it should," he went on, as if thinking it out. "Your crowd doesn't know me, and you'll never see anything of my crowd. Moreover, even if I happened to be recognized by any friend of yours who saw us together, he'd probably know at the same time that my reputation in my own field is all right. Any Broadway authority will tell you," he went on after a slight pause, "that I know a lot of people in the underworld. So I do. But there's nothing to my discredit in that, either, from my point of view, and you'll never meet them."

He stopped now, as if he had said all he meant to say. Barry was silent. It was so important to say the right thing. And he had never liked J. C. Bleeker better than in that moment.

"I've always been interested in types," he began at last. The other man threw him a quick look, as if he didn't quite know what to make of the remark; but he finally took it up.

"All right," he suggested with returning assurance. "Regard me as a type."

"I will," Barry grinned. He had definitely made up his mind that Brian Strong's private life was no affair of Barry Cabot's. He liked the man, was fascinated by him, and he considered himself under lifelong obligations.

"Great. Then that's settled and I'm glad it is. Having Dink loom up at our table to-night hastened this show-down a bit, but of course I meant to have it soon, anyway. I didn't want to sail in your craft under false pretenses."

He went away soon after that; but, as it turned out, the talk was an excellent preparation for a little chat Barry had with the branch manager of his bank the following Monday. When that official, whose name was Howson, summoned his most promising assistant into his private office, the young man went without apprehension.

Ward Howson was a former classmate of Barry's at Cambridge, as well as a nephew of the bank's distinguished president, Alfred E. Howson. The latter fact, in Barry's opinion, was a complete explanation of the

nephew's position as branch manager. The youth had no striking business ability and his life's vital interest was polo; but as a beginner in the banking world he modeled himself on the highest banking type he knew, and in business hours, when he could remember to do so, masked his pink good-humored face with an imitation of his uncle's natural austerity of expression which his associates endeavored in vain to imitate. Next to polo his interest was clothes, and his business suits, shirts, and ties were the highest expression of England's best sartorial authority.

When he was not being a young Napoleon of finance Howson radiated the zest and wholesomeness of an outdoor sportsman, and Barry liked and admired that side of him. The two were close friends. It was only when Howson chose to pose as beacon and counselor to his staff that his old classmate grew restive. Unfortunately, this was to be one of those occasions, and Barry realized it as soon as he glanced at the set countenance of his superior. For the moment, indeed, young Howson was looking almost more like Uncle Alfred than Uncle Alfred looked like himself.

In a portentous manner he offered Barry a chair.

"Cabot," said the branch manager, without relaxing his sternness of feature, "we think a lot of you here."

"That's very good of you." Barry grinned. He knew there was a string to the tribute.

"Yes, and I think you'll admit that we've tried to show our appreciation of your work. We've pushed

you up as fast as conditions and fairness to others allowed."

Barry nodded.

"I haven't a thing to complain of," he cheerfully conceded. He was again congratulating himself on the fact that his post in the bank had come to him through Colonel Jessup and not through Ward Howson.

"But—" Suddenly Howson leaned forward and dropped what his staff called "the old man's mug." "See here, Barry," he went on appealingly. "I hope you won't go up in the air about this, but I've got to speak to you. The fact is, I saw you dining at the Ritz Saturday night with Brian Strong."

"Did you?" Barry asked with interest. "I didn't see you."

"Yes, I did. And I saw Dink the Shadow go over to your table and speak to Strong and get the glacial glare. What I'm getting at," he went on as the young man facing him seemed waiting for this explanation, "is that Dink the Shadow and Jim Bleecker, alias Brian Strong, aren't the best companions for a rising young banker to be seen with in public."

"Is Strong's name really Jim Bleecker?"

"Supposed to be. He's said to belong to the old Bleecker family; college man, black sheep, all that stuff. The point is—"

"The first point I want covered, Howson, if you don't mind, is whether this talk is your idea or your uncle's."

"Both," said young Howson, promptly. "I told Uncle

Alfred about it yesterday. Had to, you understand. My job. Our most promising lad seen in bad company—that sort of thing. Sorry to do it, but had to get busy.”

Barry softened. He liked Howson, classmate and polo-player, as much as he deplored Howson the branch manager.

“Surely your uncle didn’t take this thing seriously?” he asked.

Howson nodded.

“He did,” he confessed. “And to tell you the truth, old man, I was surprised. I hadn’t thought he would. Just dropped the information in passing, as it were. Wasn’t sure he’d even pick it up and look at it. But, by Jove, he went after that ball as if the game depended on it. He got Strong’s record within two hours; not an easy thing on Sunday. The old man has his way of getting information, though, and I’ll say it’s a good one. By the time lunch was over—I told him just before lunch—we had a full report on Strong that was better than Strong could have made out, himself.”

“I’ll bet it was.”

“Oh, it was straight, all right,” Howson hastened to maintain. “Dispassionate, you know. Names, dates, places, names of pals, finger-prints, trials, and a photograph that few who know him would recognize now.”

“Trials!” Barry was stunned and showed it. “When and what for?”

“Yes. Two of ’em, one six, the other ten years ago. Both for gang jobs, confidence rackets. Strong seems to have been drawn into the net with several leaders

of a certain gang because he occasionally ran with them. There wasn't any good evidence against him and he was acquitted both times. But of course neither episode did him any good."

"I thought he was a gambler."

"So he is, and they say he's a square one. Anyway, so far as the record goes, he's never been mixed up with anything queer at cards, though he plays with the big fellows and for big money. But, like all the rest of them, he has affiliations with the thugs, and naturally he takes a chance of being drawn in when the law is after some of his little playmates. Dink the Shadow is his special jackal, they say, and he's been seen lately with Jack-knife Casey and the Featherbed, gangsters that have given the police a good many bad nights. They're henchman of the Bosco brothers, two big figures in the underworld, and it doesn't look good for Strong to be with them."

He gave his assistant time to make a comment, but when Barry did not use it Howson went on easily:

"They say the Jack-knife gets his name because he wears knife-blades in the soles of his fighting-shoes and jumps on his victims when he gets 'em down. Featherbed can gouge out a human eye quicker than any other gangster, and he wears a brass thumb-tip to help him do it."

"Where did you get that stuff?" Barry was sick at heart. He had found a hero at nine; he had worshiped that hero in the secret places of his boy's heart; he had since then associated the hero with all that was finest and best in life; and now at the mention of that

hero's name black rivers of New York sewage were roaring past his ears.

"Newspaper man, Criminal Courts reporter," Howson was explaining. "Knows all the dope. I asked him to dinner at the club last night because I wanted to make a few inquiries of my own. The things he told me—"

"I think he was stuffing you."

"Not a chance of it. In the first place, he simply couldn't have made up the yarns he told me. No normal mind could conceive the things those thugs do. In the second place, he's Ned Wheeler, our old pal at Cambridge, winning his spurs now on Daddy's newspapers. I don't know when I've been such a good listener. I kept him talking till midnight. By the way," his face crinkled into a grin, "did you ever hear how Featherbed got his nickname?"

"Of course not. I never heard of Featherbed till to-day," Barry muttered dourly.

Howson's pink disk took on the content of the raconteur.

"Wheeler told me that, too. It was this way," he began cozily settling back in his handsome swivel-chair. "It seems there was a fire in one of the tenements where Featherbed and the Jack-knife and two other gangsters had rooms together on the third floor. They didn't call him Featherbed then, though he weighed almost three hundred pounds. I think his name is Kelly. They were cut off from the staircase by the flames and it was quite a drop from the third-story window. The yarn goes that Kelly's three pals threw him out of the

window so they could drop on him and break their fall. They did it, too, and he was in the hospital for six weeks. But he has such a forgiving nature that he only killed one of them when he came out; and he and the Jack-knife are as chummy as ever."

He waited for a tribute but received none from his ungrateful listener.

"All right, Howson. What are you leading up to?"

Barry spoke wearily, for the world had turned black. Howson glanced at him and repressed an impulse to look like Uncle Alfred. The polo-player who had been about to give way to the banker answered the question.

"Nothing but a friendly warning, old chap," he said earnestly. "A word to the wise, you know; that sort of thing. I needn't tell you that it doesn't look well for a youngster in your position—" he himself was exactly a year older than Barry—"to trot around with gamblers and gangsters."

Barry sat back in his chair. The face of Brian Strong swung before him, as it had looked when Brian Strong expressed his wish for a few hours off.

"All right, Howson," he said again. "That's what you and your uncle say. Now here's what I say, and I hope you'll put it to your uncle straight." He stopped and gave himself a moment for reflection. "I see your side of this," he went on more slowly, "and I admit that if I made a point of playing about with gamblers and gangsters it wouldn't be a good thing for me or for the bank, especially for me. On the other hand, I hold that I've worked for this bank for two years—

it's just two years this month—and that I've proved I have the right to choose my own friends. I haven't the faintest idea of getting mixed up with any thugs or outlaws—”

“Then that's understood,” Howson interrupted with great relief.

“*But*—hold on, wait a minute.” Barry held up a warning hand. “I won't let you or your uncle or anybody else dictate to me who my friends shall be or shall not be. I like the man you call Brian Strong. I like him immensely. I've known him since I was a boy. I consider myself under obligations to him. I don't intend to make myself conspicuous by being seen with him often and I certainly don't intend to have anything to do with his underworld associates. But if I want to eat an occasional meal or spend an occasional evening with Strong, I'm going to do it. And if that isn't satisfactory to the bank—” Barry rose to emphasize this ultimatum—“you can have my resignation.”

Howson shook his head.

“How damned independent a private income makes a chap feel!” he mused aloud.

Barry grinned wanly.

“There's something in that, I suppose. Just the same, my job means a lot more to me than the salary I get for it.”

“I know.” Howson looked up at him resignedly. “You've said exactly what Uncle Alfred said you'd say,” he went on. “I didn't agree with him.”

“Then you were wrong. You'll find that you're

usually wrong when you don't agree with Uncle Alfred," Barry added kindly as he turned toward the door. "What else did Uncle Alfred say?" he stopped to ask.

Howson hesitated.

"Do you want exactly what he said or an expurgated version?" he asked guardedly.

"I'll take it straight."

"Well, then—" if Ward Howson seemed to enjoy this recital it must be remembered that his assistant had been rather curt with him a moment earlier—"he said that under your New England frosting you were a hot-blooded young ass who wouldn't stand dictation, and that you'd probably hang yourself if we gave you enough rope. I didn't agree with him about that, either," Howson ended.

But here again, as Barry Cabot later realized, Uncle Alfred was right.

CHAPTER III

QUEENIE OFFERS SOME ADVICE

IT BECAME clear that what he mentally characterized as "heart talks" were indicated for Barry that season, for a third talk soon followed his intimate interviews with Strong and Ward Howson. This time it was Jan's friend Queenie Morris who breezed into his sitting-room one night in November and relieved her mind of its burden.

Being a highly unconventional young woman, and having some doubt as to Cabot's willingness to receive her, Miss Morris dispensed with the aid of such preliminaries as telephoning or sending up a card. She gained the young man's presence by the simple expedient of rapping on his portal.

"Just blew out of Jan's joint, next door," she cheerfully explained as he opened the door and tried to conceal his surprise at finding her on his threshold. "If you can spare a minute, I got an earful for you."

Barry assured Miss Morris that his entire life was at her disposal, and Queenie gave him a lustrous glance and followed him to an easy-chair drawn up to the fireplace.

"You're sure good to yourself," she commented as she threw off her coat, accepted a cigarette, lit it at the

lighter he held for her, and relaxed agreeably in the big chair. She looked around the comfortable room. " 'From me to me, with my love,' seems to be your slogan, all right. 'Course you know," she added severely, "that luxury like this at the beginnin' of your c'reer ain't goin' to get you nowhere."

"Is that what you came here to tell me?" Barry asked the question with a grin. Miss Morris amused him.

"Nope, I just threw that in for good measure. I got a kind heart." The caller sent forth a series of beautiful smoke rings and gave herself a moment for open admiration of them. She had suddenly discovered that it was not so easy to give this young man an earful as she had expected it to be. He was there with the supplies and the polish, all right, but he had a disconcerting air of expecting her to get down to brass tacks. She finally did so.

"Why don't you stage a rescue act?" she suddenly demanded. "Why don't you get busy an' take Jan away from that outfit she's runnin' with?"

"I'm not my brother's keeper, you know."

Barry was not surprised by her opening gun. He had suspected that she was here to talk about Janet.

"Who the hell said anything about your brother?" Miss Morris was annoyed and showed it. "I'm talkin' about Janet Perry. She's one of the best, an' she's really interested in what she calls her music, though Gawd knows it don't sound like music to me," the speaker dispassionately threw out in passing. "But mebbe it is. Anyway, it's a damned sight better for her

than the night clubs an' the loose-ankle boys she's murderin' the rest of her hours with."

"It's odd to hear you slam the night clubs," Barry observed. "Aren't you one of their best and brightest ornaments?"

"Sure I am. I'm a crown jool," his visitor admitted. "But Jake's club is the best of the lot when it comes to the Sunday-school test. No rough stuff, no pocket-pickin', no little private rooms for two, no knock-out drops, no ethyl an' lethal in the booze. Any one'd tell you that. Jake don't want to bump off our guests. He wants 'em to live an' come again. He's married an' he lives in a flat on the upper East Side an' he's got two kids an' a wife that's all to the good. His baby's six months old—an' is he cute! Say, that kid can blow twenty bubbles a minute!"

She meditated on this achievement for a moment and then went on: "Believe me or not, Jake's wife ain't never seen the inside of a night club. They ask me to dinner 'bout once a month, an' do I go? I go with bells on."

Barry admitted that Jake's record, as here given, was superb.

"He does things for folks, too," the raconteuse continued. "Listen. A few years ago a girl came here from Chicago that'd lost her mem'ry. She didn't know who she was or anything about herself. Jake give her a job—she could dance, all right—an' he kinda looked after her till she straightened herself out. She turned out to be some one mighty important, and every time she comes to New York her an' her husband gives a

big party at Jake's. They've sent most of Chicago to Jake's club, too," she ended appreciatively.

Having finished her cigarette, Miss Morris accepted another but refused a drink. She was on her way to Jake's and her nightly duties, and a municipal Christmas-tree fully illumined would have seemed a somber thing beside her. Barry wondered what Alfred E. Howson would think of her if he glanced into the room at the moment, and the reflection made him laugh out. His caller looked pleased and then suddenly became thoughtful.

"Mebbe I'm keepin' you from somethin'," she tentatively observed.

"No. I'm not going anywhere. Saturday's about my only night out."

"I know. The bright boy of the bank. Hits the hay at ten-thirty-one P. M. an' has his daily dozen every mornin' at seven-thirty-six. Eats what's good for his little tummy an' always thinks pious thoughts."

"Where did you get that idea?" Barry spoke coldly.

"From a little boid. But what I'm callin' your attention to," Miss Morris added firmly, at last returning to the object of her visit, "is that Jan Perry ain't doin' none of those things."

"I don't see what I can do about it," Barry protested.

"You're her friend, ain't you?"

"Yes, I am."

"Well, don't that mean somethin'?"

"It doesn't mean that I have any right to butt into her private affairs."

Queenie grinned her gamin grin. The power of this

cabaret hostess in her world—and she had considerable power—lay in the divining-rod of understanding she bore through life. She knew exactly what reactions her conservative young host was passing through. He didn't want his orderly existence disturbed by any such SOS as she was sending out; but she was not here to consider his wishes.

"You'd jump into a lake for her if she was drownin', wouldn't you? You'd drag her out of the way if an automobile was goin' to run over her. . . . Or would you?" she stopped to ask, as one who had an open mind.

"Of course I would." Barry drew his chair a little closer to her and Queenie followed the maneuver with an approving eye, unconscious that his own carefully lowered voice was a hint to her not to take the entire household into her confidence. As if to emphasize the momentary silence a roar of laughter came to their ears from the adjoining apartment and a girl shrieked hysterically. One of Janet's little parties was obviously in progress.

"Get on to that," Miss Morris earnestly advised. "Won't she be given the air by the agent of this house if she keeps it up?"

Barry nodded. He had thought of this several times.

"They're not often as noisy as they are to-night," he murmured, as much for his own reassurance as for Queenie's.

"What I was going to say," he now told his caller, "is that there's a difference between saving a girl from

drowning or street dangers and trying to interfere with her private life. If I began to . . . to . . .”

“To tell her where she gets off,” the guest helpfully suggested.

“Yes. If I did that, she’d be furious. She’d tell me it was none of my business, and she’d be perfectly right. Besides, to come down to the point, what I’ve heard about her gang—and of course I’ve got it all from her—makes me feel that they’re a fairly decent lot. They’re making some extra noise to-night, but they’re usually pretty quiet. What I’m wondering,” he added gently, “is why you yourself don’t speak to her if you think it should be done. She’d listen to you.”

“She would not! I’ve tried it,” Queenie admitted, “an’ she told me exactly where I could go. She seemed in a hurry to have me get there, too. First she was ragin’ an’ then she laughed, an’ I guess she ain’t stopped laughin’ yet. I s’pose it was funny—me givin’ her advice! As to her gang bein’ quiet, Jake put the whole lot of ’em out of his place, the other night. An’ you can take it from me,” she added solemnly, “he wouldn’t of done that if he could help it, because he knows I’m strong for Jan.”

“I’m awfully sorry to hear that.” Barry was slightly staggered. “I had no idea—”

“Well, you got an idea now. That’s what I’m here for—to give you some ideas. You say you’re Jan’s friend. All right. Show me. What I mean,” she added hastily, “is, show Jan. She’s the one that needs to be shown that some one cares whether she stays on the

toboggan or hops off. If she stays, she's goin' to hit the bottom some of these days; and, believe me, she'll hit it damned hard.

"The way I see it is this," she went on, realizing that Barry was now giving her his whole attention. "Here's a girl that ain't got a chance unless some one else gets busy. She's got a yen for this life an' it's goin' to grow. Her father's in South America, wherever that is. I'm hopin' he'll fall off one of his bridges some day. If I had time I'd pray for it. He's no good. His idea of father stuff is to send that girl ten times as much sugar as she ought to have. As fast as she empties her cup in the cupboard, he fills it again. That brought a dozen bums around her as soon as she hit the town; an' now the good news has gone out an' they're runnin' to her from most of our big centers. Some of 'em act quiet, like you say, but not one of them's on the up-an'-up, and the manners an' mor'ls of a few of those lads would give a boy like you a nervous chill. An' all the time this is goin' on," she added, with a sudden edge to her voice, "Jan's boy friend is settin' in the next flat, thinkin' how ree-fined life is an' wonderin' will he be president of the bank next year or not till the year after."

Queenie seemed to have completed her oration, for she now rose and reached for her fur coat. Barry got up and silently helped her into it. His face was flushed, but his vivid blue eyes looked into hers with glints of amusement in them.

"I don't wonder Jan's strong for you, Big Boy," Queenie brought out with a sigh. Under the influence

of this discovery she added reflectively, "You got it all."

Barry grinned at her, like the small boy he still felt himself at moments. Then he sobered.

"I'll do what I can," he promised. "But I've no idea how to start. How do you think I ought to begin? Talk to her?"

Queenie shook her bobbed blond head. Putting one gold-slippered foot on the brass fender before her, she stared into the fire.

"The first thing I'd do," she said at last, "is go out with her gang an' give 'em the once-over. That'll show you whether I'm right or not, an' it'll show Jan what that gang really is—if you know what I mean? With you lookin' on she'll see 'em the way you do, an' I'm bettin' that will give her some jolt."

She ended with a laugh less optimistic than her words and started for the door.

"S'long," she casually threw back.

Barry, who had followed her to the door, took her hand and pressed it.

"You're a good sort," he said gratefully. "I'll do what I can; but you may hear a call for help before long. You see," he added. "I haven't had any experience in this sort of thing."

Miss Morris looked at him. There was a friendly expression in her keen eyes and she gave him a smile that went well with the rhinestone-trimmed front of her evening gown. She nodded thoughtfully.

"I got a hunch," she assured him, "that you ain't as simple as you look!"

The door closed on her departure and her startled host was left to digest this unfortunate climax of an otherwise inspiring interview.

It had been remarked by members of the faculty at Harvard that one of Cabot's few faults as a student was a tendency to procrastinate. When he tackled a job he did it thoroughly, but he frequently showed a disposition to take his time in approaching a task that suggested hard labor. Warned of the dangers of this policy, he had set himself to change it, and a nice illustration of his progress in the effort was afforded by his conduct now.

With the departure of Miss Morris, every conservative, self-protective, and indolent instinct in him urged him to go comfortably to bed and take up "later on" the duty she had put upon him. These instincts, he realized, had to be suppressed at once. It should not be hard to conquer them, for they had been weakened by the repression of years. With a sigh which was his sole acknowledgment of their existence, Barry went into his dressing-room, rebrushed his shining black hair, and vainly inspected his evening clothes for creases. He then arranged the fire-screen more carefully, snapped off the electric light, turned his back upon the carnal comforts of his own quarters, and strode to Jan's door. He would drop in on her and her friends, and if, when they started their usual exodus toward the night club, she asked him to go with them, he would accept the invitation.

A momentary hope that the visit to her flat would

suffice for that evening was conquered almost without a struggle. With set jaws and determined knuckles the future financier assaulted the panels of Janet's door. He had to knock loudly to be heard above the clamor within. Janet herself answered the summons, and her flushed face deepened in color as her eyes met the caller's. Barry realized that she was not glad to see him, and the discovery made him glad he had come. She must be doing something she was ashamed of. She recovered in an instant the self-possession she had lost.

"Look who's here," she cried gaily. "Come in, come in. Ladies and gentlemen," she added as the new-comer crossed the threshold, "let me present the friend of my innocent childhood and the stern critic of my later years, Mr. Barry Cabot."

Barry entered the familiar living-room that now seemed packed to discomfort with human beings. Later he realized that only nine young men and three girls in addition to Janet were the possessors of the numerous arms and legs that were scattered about the place, but for the moment there seemed scores of them. The guests differed in many respects, but they had at least one characteristic in common: they all sprawled. A languid, blond young man, good-looking enough to be a moving-picture star, lay at full length on the divan. Two more, less picturesque but equally indolent, sprawled on a rug before the fire with their elbows on floor cushions. A girl Jan subsequently addressed as "Mazie" sat sideways in an easy-chair with her thin silk-stockinged legs dangling over one arm of it. A youth on the floor in front of the chair rested his head

against her thigh, and in another easy-chair an absorbed couple sat together, arms lovingly interlocked, while both drank at short intervals from the same glass. Disregarding the presence of the new-comer, they continued a low-voiced tête-à-tête sprinkled with titters. Mrs. Perry was nowhere to be seen. Barry realized that she did not grace Jan's "at homes," as the girl imaginatively called them.

Some of the guests nodded to the new arrival. Others ignored the general introduction and looked through him as impersonally as if he had been a window. Only the girl called Maizie had a loitering eye. Her gaze dwelt on him and she sent him a smile of invitation. Before he could respond to it the blond young man on the divan rose and shook hands. Barry wished he hadn't, for the young man had the manner of a host.

"Welcome, big stranger," the blond young man said genially. "We been expecting you. Take your weight off your feet and park right here." He motioned the new-comer to a seat beside him on the divan, and turned to the rest with great animation. "Now you folks can hand me that ten dollars, and be damned quick about it."

A howl of protest burst from the gathering and rattled the numerous glasses on a near-by table.

"Well, I like that," one of the young men on the rug roared above the general din. "He breezes in a week after the whole thing is off, and you want to collect."

"The whole thing isn't off," the blond young man vociferated. "There was absolutely no time limit to

the experiment. I said I'd get Cabot here by the power of concentrated thought and here he is. I didn't say *when* . . . did I, Jan?"

"You didn't. I think you ought to have the ten, Jerry."

"Then you'll have to cough it up," muttered a girl who had not spoken before. "No one else in this gang has ten berries."

"That's all right." The blond young man lay down again, absently depositing his head in Barry's lap. Barry promptly moved from under it.

"You'll be more comfortable alone," he affably observed, crossing to an empty chair near the couch. The blond young man sighed.

"An undeveloped social sense," he assured the others. "However, it's quite all right," he assured Barry. "Two hours from now you'll probably be trying to put your head in my lap; and I'll let you," he added forgivingly. "When do I get the ten, Jan?"

"Later on. And I'll remind the rest," Janet raised her voice above the renewed clamor of protest, "that, as you're making me give the prize, I can be the judge of whether or not it's been earned. I think Jerry put his experiment over in great shape, and he ought to have a vote of thanks instead of all this grouching."

She turned to Barry and explained:

"You see, Jerry's a wonder at mind-control and telepathy. Last Tuesday night he made a bet that he'd will you to come in here. I had just told the gang I could never get you to come to my parties. So Jerry said he'd land you at my knees to beg my pardon for

not coming sooner. By the way, you haven't done that yet, Jerry."

She was Miss Perry of Wheaton to-night and Barry was reassured.

"Give me time," Jerry said. He had filled a glass, obviously to celebrate his triumph, and was taking deep drafts of its contents. The others broke out again, led by the two youths on the rug. Even the absorbed couple in the arm-chair aroused themselves to a vague interest in the discussion.

"Jerry hasn't made Cabot kneel, and he didn't make him come," one young man on the rug called out. "He didn't bring him in alone. Every one of us helped him last Tuesday night. We all willed at once."

"Yes, and that's what gummed the machine," Jerry bitterly testified, finishing his drink. "Alone, I'd have done the stunt in ten minutes. With you morons butt-ing in, it took a week, and I admit it's an imperfect job. Cabot—" his voice took on a plaintive note—"would you mind getting down on your knees at Miss Perry's feet and asking her pardon for not coming sooner?"

"I would," Barry admitted. "But I'm willing to ask her pardon from this comfortable chair, if that will do."

"It'll do," Jerry conceded. "The whole job's messed up, anyway. I'll take the ten in ones, Jan. It will look more like a roll."

"That money ought to be divided," one of the girls suddenly announced. "We've all earned it as much as

Jerry has. Besides, if you give Jerry ten dollars, we won't see him again till it's gone. You know perfectly well he never shows up here if he has a cent to go anywhere else."

This remark caused a momentary constraint in the gathering, and Janet, who had turned a look of keen disapproval on the speaker, created a diversion.

"I'll give you the ten dollars in ones or any other way you want it," she told Jerry, "if you'll do some stunt that will show Barry of Wheaton that this isn't all talk. . . . He really can put something over, once in a while," she assured Barry, in a lower voice.

"Oh, all right. What I've just shown you would have convinced intelligent minds." Jerry spoke sulkily. "But if you've got to have it even simpler, I'm on. Would you mind going into the outside hall, Cabot?" As Barry rose and started toward the door Jerry stopped him. "I suppose you know how the thing's done," he drawled. "You go out in the hall and empty your mind."

The girl in the arm-chair uttered a shriek of laughter.

"Sounds like a waste-paper basket," she yelped. Barry decided that she was the hysterical one. Jerry turned a cold gaze upon her and gave the look time to sink in.

"Try to think of nothing," Jerry then continued, returning his attention to Barry. "I'll admit you'll have a harder job of it than most of those present. While you're out of the room I'll will you to do a certain

thing when you come in again. Your part is to follow any impulse you have when you get back into this room."

"An' no matter w'at it is, dearie," the girl Maizie drawled, "it'll be absoootly all right for you to do it."

Barry left the room. He felt rather foolish and very much relieved. If this was the sort of thing that worried Miss Morris, he thought he could reassure her the next time they met. He recalled taking part in similar diversions in the parlors of Wheaton when he was fifteen years old. Awaiting his call to action, he heard a whirlwind of laughter, then Janet's excited voice.

"You'll do nothing of the sort, Jerry," she said, and again it was Janet of Wheaton who spoke. "And if I hear one more bright idea like that," she went on in a different tone, "there won't be any prize given to-night."

She had raised her voice above the clamor, which now died down. Barry flushed. He could form some notion of what the bright idea had been. A few minutes later Jerry opened the door.

"Come in, old man," he invited. He added when they were inside, "Now stand still a minute, till you're sure your mind has my message. Then do anything your little heart dictates."

Barry stood in the center of the room, looking around it and feeling idiotic. The crowd was quiet and attentive. He felt no impulse to do anything at all, but he tried to play up. He started toward the grand piano and wondered whether he ought to have an impulse to hear Janet sing. He had never had such an impulse

and had none now. He walked over to a long reading table covered with books, magazines, and sheet music and stood staring down at it. There was an open silver box on the table, half filled with cigarettes. He took one. The "gang" shouted. Jerry rose and bowed spectacularly.

"If any one doubts my powers after that," he drawled, "he'd better not say so. I'll make him run around the block all night." He crossed the room to his hostess. "I'll trouble you for that ten, Jan, and then I've got to toddle off."

"Pig!" said Maizie. "He's afraid if he goes out wit' this bunch," she told Barry, who had now responded to her early invitation and was sitting beside her, "he'll blow some of the kale on 'em. Don't worry, Jerry," she added sweetly, "you wouldn't. I seen you resist the temptation every time!"

"Say, Maizie, tell us the next time you see that temptation come," urged one of the young men on the rug. "I've got to be shown that Jerry ever had it."

The entire group appeared to be embittered by the fact that Jerry was now pocketing ten dollars handed him by his hostess. Janet realized the acute discontent of her guests.

"Drown your sorrows in drink," she advised and indicated the empty glasses on every hand and a number of bottles on a sideboard. The suggestion was a welcome one. Even Jerry lingered for a final libation before he breezed out into the open spaces. Barry suppressed an impulse to go back to his own quarters and to bed. It was the sole impulse he had experienced,

notwithstanding Jerry's will power. He had automatically picked up a cigarette because the box was in front of him and every one else was smoking. Janet caught his involuntary move to rise.

"Don't go," she ordered. "We're all going up to the Cockcrow Club now and I want you to stick around."

Barry groaned inwardly and smiled brightly.

"All right. Thanks."

"You'll go . . . sure thing?" Janet seemed unable to believe in her victory. "That's great! The Cockcrow's one of the high spots," she added eagerly, "and it has the best dance music in town."

Evidently the hostess decided the party's destination, for no protests or suggestions were offered by the guests. Those guests, to Barry's eyes, were by this time somewhat vaguely transforming themselves into individuals.

The two youths on the rug were brothers, and were referred to as "the Hellish Twins" by their admiring circle. They had slim, rather elegant figures, which they dressed to perfection; pale, weak faces, exactly alike, which showed the effects of bad air, late hours, and over-drinking; and really charming manners when they chose to exert themselves, which was not often. The favorite diversion of each was to make his intimates think he was the other brother, an achievement too easy to interest any one else. They quarreled fiercely and frequently and were rarely apart. They had no visible means of support but moved in circles on which they could always depend for meals and amusements. Where they went when the night clubs closed, was a

mystery none of their intimates ever solved. They were never seen from three in the morning till lunch-time, when they appeared at some friend's table in a hotel or restaurant, admirably dressed and full of confidence in their power to charm. They knew every one in New York's night life and had the gossip of its various strata at their tongues' end. They were a human "Who's Who," opening up, as it were, at any name, and easily closed when one was weary of their chronicles.

Barry, who learned all this from Maizie, was assured by the same high authority that Janet was mighty lucky to have caught the twins in her social net. They were, Maizie said, the cat's whiskers in the night-club crowd. Barry could not appreciate Jan's good fortune. He had a strong desire to step on the Hellish Twins, every time he came in contact with them, and only the stern discipline to which he had long subjected his impulses enabled him to overcome this one.

Maizie, who quietly annexed him while the crowd was having its final drink before leaving Jan's flat, also was one of the hostesses in Jake's club, and she had made it plain that she was departing at once for that scene of her activities. She was a stunning-looking girl with a perfect figure, a superb carriage, and the diction of a gutter-snipe. She was said to be Russian-born but admitted that she didn't know "the lingo." As a matter of record, she had been taken in charge by the Gerry Society when she was a young immigrant of four and adopted by a Brooklyn family when she was six; and she had so misconducted herself from that tender age onward that when she ran away at fourteen

her foster-parents refrained from efforts to recover her. She was second to Miss Morris in authority at Jake's, but only Maizie was conscious of any rivalry between herself and the head hostess. Miss Morris disapproved of everything about Maizie, and treated her with invariable justice and consideration. Maizie had ophidian tendencies, and undulated and coiled. Barry disliked her even more than he did the Hellish Twins, but he exerted himself to play up in response to her overtures. He might find Maizie useful.

In addition to these three, Janet, and himself, there were seven other guests whose names he had not caught. Two of them were sisters, dark and pretty, well dressed, like all the gang, and with what he considered the hardest faces he had ever seen on girls so young. His first really interesting discovery in this new world he was penetrating was that the women in it all seemed harder than the men, whose faces as a rule were merely weak and self-indulgent. The five remaining young men bore out this theory. Save for an eye weariness which they all had in common, they might have been young clerks at a ribbon or glove counter in any department-store. But Barry reminded himself that of course he hadn't yet seen any of these lads in action.

When Janet gave the signal for departure—she moved her guests as if they were pawns on a chess-board—he excused himself and slipped back to his own quarters for his coat, hat, and some money. He took with him all the bank-notes he found in a small wall safe in which he kept his cash reserve. He had a suspicion that the evening would be an expensive one.

The party dropped Maizie at Jake's club, on the way uptown. The remaining guests, in what the twins referred to as three "rattlers," continued their journey to the Cockcrow, which they entered in a chattering group that drew every eye upon them. So far as Barry could see, all the tables were occupied, and a number of them were already encroaching upon the dancing-space in the center of the big room: but the head waiter at once got into action, ordered two extra tables brought in, and placed them together on the outer edge of the room, remote from the dancing-square. The gang was evidently a familiar one to him, and Barry observed that the man's respectful greeting was tinged with apprehension. Presented to Barry by the hostess, his acknowledgment of the new-comer was almost effusive. Possibly he expected this stalwart youth to keep order at the newly added tables.

Barry was not wholly a novice in night clubs, but neither was he an habitu  . Looking around him with interest, he decided that this one probably was better than the average. The room was big and its walls were gorgeously decorated in the ultra-modern style, the chief motive being something that represented a rampant crowing cock outlined against a gorgeous rising sun. The several hundred guests were in full evening dress, and there was a good sprinkling among them of what Barry recognized as the Social Register set. The tables were attractive; glass, linen and china were immaculate; and the waiters—a husky lot—wore fresh liveries and clean linen, and did not perspire obtrusively. One of New York's most popular cabaret conductors

led a stimulating jazz band. Two magnums of champagne nestling in cracked ice appeared on the table before Janet's guests were seated, and Barry paid for them. The hostess made a gesture expressing temporary acceptance and certain future settlement and ordered a round of cocktails and Welsh Rabbits. One of the Hellish Twins protested pathetically.

"I'm hungry," he pointed out. "I'm a strong man and I need to be fed. I want a great big tenderloin steak with fried potatoes and onions."

"Give him what he wants," Janet told the waiter and the steak was brought in due time. The others appeared satisfied with their Rabbits. No one but the twin was hungry, but it at once became clear that with the exception of the hostess and Barry the entire party had an active and consuming thirst.

CHAPTER IV

ENTER TONY THE CAT

THE orgy that followed was the sort of thing young Cabot had often read about but had never seen equaled or approached, even at a college dinner after a football victory. Cocktails entered the guests as nickels enter a slot-machine, and at first with little more effect. An hour later, however, the drinkers became noisy and the twins were irritable. Barry danced the first dance with Janet and was given the doubtful tribute of an amazed acceptance of his skill.

"You dance beautifully, Big Boy," she warmly assured him. "It's a relief, for I expected you'd spend the evening on my feet instead of on your own. I thought you'd be above this dancing stunt. My experience is that the whiter the dancer's soul, the surer he is to send his partner sprawling."

"You act as if you couldn't distinguish me from old Jessup," Barry grumbled later on, when she complimented him again. "I haven't been in Wheaton all my life."

"No, and I'm beginning to see you've made some use of the intervals."

So far, at least, she was principally Janet of Wheaton, and Barry needed such comfort as this gave

him; for their return to the table, after this dance and two encores, revealed the twins quarreling hotly and one of the sisters, whose name he now learned was Kershaw, exhibiting a passionate determination to mount the table and do an acrobatic stunt amid the crockery. All the champagne had followed the innumerable cocktails, and several of the guests—who had already indulged freely, in Janet's apartment—were in a state of hysterical intoxication. No one save Barry and the head waiter seemed disturbed by these conditions. That servitor now approached the table, with smiling lips and cold eyes.

"Everything is satisfactory, Mademoiselle?" he politely asked Janet, and added in an undertone as he bent over the table ostensibly to move the centerpiece: "It is not well to attract too much attention this evening. There are many outsiders here; and card games are going on, off the corridor so near your table. If Mademoiselle can restrain a little the spirits of her guests . . ."

Janet nodded, but she also flushed. Barry was glad to see that flush. Judging by what he had heard from Miss Morris and observed himself, she must be accustomed to such tacit criticism of her group, but she was not altogether hardened to it. She spoke to the gang with decision.

"Fan, sit down and shut up. . . . Charlie, if you don't stop fussing I'll break up the party. And believe me, if I do that," she added warningly, "there's no place we'll go from here."

The warning temporarily sobered Miss Kershaw, especially as her sister lent timely aid to it by dipping

the corner of her napkin in cold water and briskly applying it to Fan's eyes and temples.

"What in hell d'you thing you're doin'?" the outraged recipient of this attention hotly inquired. "You've taken my eyebrows off!"

She extracted a vanity-case from her hand-bag and the repairing of the damage held her attention for five minutes. Charlie, the more quarrelsome of the twins, subdued his criticism of his brother to low mutterings.

"All the champagne's gone, Jan," one of the nondescript young men pointed out. "Hadn't you better order another round?"

"All right, Dave, all right. But why the devil don't you lads get up and shake an ankle with the girls once in a while? What do you think you're here for? The exercise may keep you sober a few minutes longer, too," the candid hostess added bitterly, as she beckoned to the head waiter and ordered two more magnums. He glanced at the temporarily subdued guests and went away to fill the order, and Barry paid for the champagne when it appeared.

Barry asked the more sober of the Kershaw sisters for the next dance. In further response to the strong hint of the hostess, one of the twins and the young man called Dave led Jan and the second Kershaw girl out on the floor. The restoration of her eyebrows seemed to have a generally bracing effect on the latter young person. Barry, following her progress, with anxious eyes, saw that she was dancing easily and even appeared able to talk to her partner, though she giggled

hysterically. Her sister favored him with an illuminating explanation of Fan's peculiarities.

"Fan's always like that at first," she grumbled. "Falls over under three or four cocktails an' a few glasses of fizz. When she gets her second wind she can drink a barrel of hootch an' not show it. By the time we go home she'll be the only steady one in the gang, an' she'll turn all our toes in the right direction."

Barry smiled his reservations. His one drink that evening was a whisky and soda and he had left half of it in his glass. He was not surprised to find it gone when he got back to the table. The second supply of champagne also was almost gone and another round of cocktails had been ordered by Charlie. The check smiled up at Barry from its place beside his plate. The room was very hot and increasingly crowded. A dozen additional couples had come in since Jan's party arrived and in some way room had been found for them all. But it had been taken from the dancing-space and the congestion there was already painful. During the next number Barry, whose normal dancing was of the best on the floor, bumped into an irate leader of our best circles, trod on the toes of a moving-picture actress who smiled at him forgivingly, and was finally jammed against a pillar by an energetic young man whose muttered apology gave way to a stare of surprise when he reconized his victim. Simultaneously Barry recognized the energetic young man.

"Tut, tut!" said Ward Howson, shaking his head. "Look who's here!" After an awe-struck glance at

Barry's dancing partner he added in the young man's ear, "Naughty, naughty!"

Barry laughed, but he was annoyed. Howson's partner, he realized, was a girl of his own set. He was probably at the Cockcrow with a more or less conventional party of friends. He may not yet have seen Barry's table and its group, but he could be counted on to do so after this meeting and to form his own impressions of his assistant teller's companions. Also to mention the matter to Uncle Alfred in the stern routine of his duty. Miss Jennie Kershaw, who was not unobservant, became conscious of the cloud on her companion's brow.

"Was that your Sunday-school teacher, Barry?" she asked in a far-carrying voice. She had caught only her partner's first name in Janet's offhand general introduction.

"Something like it," Barry admitted.

"I'll tell your fortune," Miss Kershaw volunteered. "You ain't goin' to get no present from his Christmas-tree after this. . . . Say, let's go back to the table and have s'more drinks."

They went. It was almost one o'clock and the general atmosphere of the place was loosening up. Solo dances were in progress. Colored search-lights swept the big room at intervals, picking out tables here and there. Roars of laughter came from a long table near Janet's where half a dozen Western buyers were being entertained by several New York merchants and two of the club's "hostesses." At another table a stout fresh-

faced woman, whose white "transformation" had slipped grotesquely over one eye, was gazing deep into the eyes of a pallid gigolo in his twenties who sat opposite her, and talking to him in whispers.

"Veedy's struck it rich," Miss Kershaw observed, following his glance and letting her own eyes linger on the pallid gigolo.

"Who's Veedy?"

"He's one of the boys that used to dance here. The club paid him to dance with the dames that didn't have partners. If he made a hit with the dames, they paid him too, so he got his both ways. Now he's got a better job. He's got that old girl, and he's got her going. She pays him a salary and all his expenses, to drag her around nights."

Barry was not especially interested in "Veedy," but he was glad to have his knowledgeable partner point out several more distinguished guests of the club—a world-famous operatic tenor, a society woman who had recently figured in a sensational divorce case and who was wearing a small fortune in diamonds. "Ain't she damn' silly to bring that show-case into a place like this?" his companion interpolated. "A lot of queer birds comes here," Jennie added. "All the little rooms off this hall near our table are private rooms for suppers and card games. You'd think they'd want a quiet place, but some of the biggest games in New York are played in there by men like Dan Skelly an' Brian Strong an' the Bosco brothers an' their gang. They think it's safer than hotel rooms, an' I guess it is. The Cockcrow's never been pulled yet."

She checked these revelations to point out a great violinist solemnly dancing with a Follies girl, and to assure Barry that a very fat man with a bald head and a purpling face, who had three of the club's hostesses at his table, was the "best sugar baby" in New York.

"He ain't got a pocket without a hole in it," she admiringly testified. "He's the lad that put the pay in champagne. When he asks a lady to supper, he buys wine by the case."

In short, Jennie, in the words of her circle, "was there with the cackle." Barry decided that she had fully repaid him for the inconvenience he had suffered on the congested dancing-floor, though her suggestion that she could dance with him forever left him cold. They had danced the encores and the interval of their absence had evidently been filled by the ordering of more drinks by their companions. Fanny Kershaw was reviving under the added stimulants, as her sister had predicted.

Two additional hours crawled into the past. Charlie and three of the nondescript young men had reached a stage of loose-lipped and pronounced intoxication. Seated next to Janet and directly facing the corridor back of their table, Barry became aware that one special room held an unusually active party. Waiters were frequently entering and leaving it with trays holding bottles and pails of ice, and the guests seemed as active as the waiters. Among those who came and went at intervals was the noiseless and swift-moving youth Howson had identified as Strong's henchman, Dink the Shadow. Barry observed also a handsome man in his forties, of the Broadway rounder type; and a big

six-foot Italian, who moved with a cat-like grace, the observer found himself watching on the two occasions when the man appeared in the corridor. All three men were in evening dress and had the air of habitués of the place.

The gang was getting noisier and Barry looked inquiringly at Janet.

"We'd better get them out, hadn't we?" he asked in a low voice.

"It will only start a row. They won't go."

Janet's speech was a trifle slow and her eyes looked heavy. He realized with a shock that even she had been drinking too much, though she had been very temperate compared with her friends. However, her brain was still clear and the Kershaw sisters also were in possession of such faculties as they had. It was the young men in the group who were ready to make trouble, and the more quarrelsome of the twins demonstrated his willingness to start it at once.

"A pois'nous party," he thickly announced. "Tha's what I call this kind of a bunch—pois'nous. An' I'll tell the worl'," he hiccuped, "my brother Cary's the mos' pois'nous party in it. Know what Cary's like? He's like somethin' tha' comes out from under a stone when you turn it over. Crawlين'! Tha's what he's like. Lis'en, I'll tell you what Cary's like. He's—"

The other boys, besotted though they were, tried vaguely to quiet him. Charlie in liquor had no verbal limitations when he got on the subject of his brother. They laid unsteady hands over his mouth and he fought them off.

"How you can stand this sort of thing, Janet," Barry said, quietly, "is beyond me. In God's name, what do you get out of it?"

Janet flushed. Again he was glad she had not lost the power to do this.

"I get some thrills out of it," she murmured. "That's what we're all after nowadays, isn't it? Thrills!"

She spoke carefully, evidently not quite sure of her diction; and as he listened, Barry's heart contracted with an actual physical pang. It was the strongest emotion Janet Perry had ever awakened in him, save on the night of Marcia Cabot's funeral. Indeed, it was the strongest emotion he had experienced in years, with the exception of his first delight in meeting Bleecker again. He bent and tried to hold her eyes.

"Janet," he begged, "give it up. Look around you. Can't you see there's nothing in all this for a nice girl?"

He was so much in earnest that his voice was not steady, and for an instant he thought he had impressed her. She met his eyes for a second and then her own dropped.

"It's good of you to bother with me, old boy," she said. "I know you came along to-night to put the brakes on and not because you wanted to. But you don't understand." She was still speaking with careful deliberation. "You think I've had a little too much," she went on with her new candor. "Well, perhaps I have. But I can ask you a question that will put you up against it, Barry. If I drop this crowd, what shall I get instead?"

As he hesitated she laughed, but the laugh was not

the laugh of Janet of Wheaton. Nor was the look in the eyes with which she held his the look of Janet of Wheaton. Again he felt that strange pang.

"See?" she pointed out, almost triumphantly. "You can't answer it. You know mighty well that New York has cold-shouldered me because I haven't any . . . any an-te-cedents." She produced the word with an air. "I haven't any background. For me, Big Boy, it's this kind of life or it's no life at all. And I'm telling you right now I've no intention of living like a nun. Not that I'm going the limit, Barry," she added quickly. "Of course you understand that."

"Of course I do. But you're all wrong about the rest of it," he said quietly. "You can't break into social New York in a few weeks or months. But if you had a little patience . . ."

She made a gesture of hopelessness. Before he could speak again the twins demanded his attention. Charlie, momentarily silenced by his friends, had resumed his verbal attack on his brother and had finally stirred that youth to retaliation. Enraged, Cary struck at Charlie's face across the table. The next instant both young men were on their feet, exchanging blows. The centerpiece wobbled and crashed. Three of the nondescript young men tried to pull the twins apart. The head waiter hastened toward them, his expression ominous.

"He won't do anything," Janet assured Barry.

She was regarding the scene indifferently, as if it were a familiar one. Barry did not share her optimism about the head waiter's attitude. He remembered that, only a few nights before, this group had been thrown

out of Jake's. However, his attention was divided. There were loud voices coming from one of the rooms off the corridor near Jan's table. What the head waiter might have done to Jan's gang Barry never learned. For the moment the band was not playing, and before the man reached the table a sound, intensely significant to such a crowd, was heard above the chatter in the room.

In criminal cases witnesses frequently testify that they have been unable to distinguish a pistol-shot from the noise of an exploding tire, but those really familiar with both sounds have no such difficulty. Many of the Cockcrow's guests could recognize a pistol-shot when they heard it, and they heard it now. The bark of an automatic came from the small room from which the raised voices had been heard, and it was immediately followed by a second shot. The head waiter stopped in his stride toward Janet, stared an instant, and then swung away in the direction of the shots. Simultaneously the door of the corridor room opened and a man staggered out.

For perhaps ten seconds he posed motionless, giving Barry, who sat directly facing him, a tableau he was never to forget. He was bent far forward, with both hands pressed tightly to his abdomen. The fingers of those protecting hands were stained with blood, and the man's clean-shaven livid face was distorted with agony. He seemed about to collapse, but the next instant he had turned his back and was lurching unsteadily toward the rear end of the hall. Barry had a glimpse of a second figure just behind the in-

jured man—a figure huge, forward-hunched, and swift-moving, which had followed him through the open door. It seemed trying to pass the other, but the corridor was too narrow. Barry saw its face . . .

He heard Janet's stifled groan of horror and cast a quick look at her. She could not have seen the second man, but possibly she had seen the wounded one, though she had shudderingly covered her face with both hands. Of all those at the table he and she alone faced directly that narrow passage. He doubted if the others had seen either figure.

As these reflections rushed through his mind, the lights went out and the big room was in complete darkness. He caught Janet's arm and by sheer force dragged her to her feet and around the table into the corridor. The next instant he was running after the injured man, pulling her with him.

"We've got to follow him. He's making for the rear exit," he whispered. "Quickest way. We can get out there, too."

They reached the exit as he spoke and, pushing past a swinging door, found themselves in a side alley. Just ahead of them something had crumpled up against a wall. Beside them a shadow seemed to flicker and pause near that huddled thing. The shrill summons of a policeman's whistle, almost immediately echoed by another, filled their ears. They dodged into a dark hallway, and thus escaped two officers coming on the run and whistling again as they came. Both policemen stopped beside the fallen figure. One remained there and the other ran on. Barry pulled his companion out of the

hallway into the alley and rushed her to the nearest street and along it, keeping close to the building. Half a block away the dimming lights of Sixth Avenue smiled at them like tired but friendly eyes. The entire episode could not have taken more than a minute or two.

They reached the avenue and caught the roving eye of the driver of the only taxicab in sight. The cab stopped at a signal and Barry lifted his companion into it. She seemed almost unconscious. He had realized that some one was close behind them—so close that he could hear the sound of breathing. Now, before he could close the door after dropping into the rear seat beside Janet, he felt something lurch against him as the follower sprang into the taxicab. Even as his foot touched the floor the new-comer slammed the door shut, reached for one of the folded front seats, pulled it down, and dropped into it.

"Step on it!" he ordered, and the taxicab started with a terrific jerk.

"Here, you—" Barry began hotly.

"Keep yer shirt on!"

The third passenger turned his head and spoke again to the driver.

"Forty-secon' Street an' Van'erbilt," he barked, adding slowly and with concentrated meaning, "*I git off dere. See?*"

The driver saw, and stepped harder. The cab skidded and rocked as it whirled around the first corner.

Barry had taken time to think. The man was no officer, no pursuer. He was another refugee from the

Cockcrow, as anxious as themselves to get away from its neighborhood. He had made his purpose clear. There was nothing to be gained by trying to eject him from the cab. He was a big fellow—young, probably in his early thirties—dark-skinned and smooth-faced. His eyes were black, with yellow lights in them. The white front of his dress-shirt gleamed under his unbuttoned overcoat. The coat collar, turned in on one side, testified to the haste with which he had flung on the garment, as did the twisted folds of a shoulder. He wore a soft hat pulled down to his heavy black eyebrows. He paid no attention to his fellow-passengers but sat crouched forward in his uncomfortable seat, staring through the open side window. Notwithstanding his motionless position there was something extraordinarily tense in his attitude. Barry kept an unwinking gaze on him. This was the man that for one instant had stood behind that reeling victim in the corridor. Young Cabot was now sure of it.

The cab stopped at the northwest corner of Forty-second Street and Vanderbilt Avenue and the stranger opened the door, got out, and handed a dollar to the driver with what seemed perfectly coördinated movements. The next instant he had turned and was walking rapidly away, still without further recognition of his companions. Barry watched him enter the Grand Central Station.

"Where do we go from here, Boss?" The driver asked the question with a care-free grin.

"Nowhere. We're getting out."

Barry helped Janet to the sidewalk. She was still dazed and speechless. He gave the driver another dollar and watched the vehicle roll away. When he could no longer hear the bronchial wheeze of its motor he signaled to a second driver—there were plenty of them around the station—and, putting Janet into the new cab, gave their address to the man at the wheel.

Janet had not yet spoken. For a moment, in the first cab, he had been sure that she had fainted.

"Night clubs offer one some odd companions," he remarked.

He felt her shiver violently against his shoulder.

"It was awful to have that horrible creature in the cab with us," she said in a tone so low he had to bend his head to catch the words. "He sat there like a big black cat ready to spring; and did you see his eyes? They shone in the dark, exactly like a cat's!"

"There was something mighty unpleasant about him," Barry admitted, "and his manners were atrocious. But I suppose he was merely going while the going was good, as we were."

She had nothing to say to this and again the silence held them. At the entrance of the house behind the iron grille Barry produced his latch-key; unlocking the front door, he led her across the threshold and helped her upstairs to the door of her flat.

"All right now," he assured her. "I'm awfully sorry you had such an experience, but it's over. Take a dose of bromide, if you have some, and go to bed. Don't admit to any one that you were in that club to-night. I

think your friends will keep their mouths shut, too. We don't want to be called as witnesses in a murder case, and that's what it was."

Janet was still shivering.

"What about the gang?" she asked, with trembling lips. "Should we have left them?"

"We should," he retorted with emphasis. "Don't worry about them. They're safe at home by this time. They know all the tricks and exits of every club in town. But if they were all caught and convicted of murder and electrocuted, it would be a damned good thing for the community. Good night," he added more quietly, already ashamed of his outburst.

Janet did not reply. She gave him a look that said in effect, "So that's what you really think of us!" and the fingers that produced her latch-key trembled. He unlocked the door, pushed it open, and gave the key back to her. She took it in silence, and still in silence crossed the threshold. He heard the door shut and its bolt shoot home as he lingered to be sure that she was safe.

CHAPTER V

HENNESSY BECOMES CURIOUS

THE story of Dan Skelly's murder at the Cockcrow Club was told the next morning, under arresting head-lines, on the front page of every newspaper in New York, and columns of details were carried over to back pages.

There were two reasons for this unusual publicity given to the death of a gambler whose passing could not be regarded by any dispassionate reader as a loss to the community. Dan Skelly had been one of the best-known and most picturesque characters in the big city's underworld, and he had been murdered in the very center of its night life. The murderer had escaped and no hint of his identity could be secured even from the close friends of the dead man, many of whom must have known who killed him. Skelly himself, though he had lived for several hours after the shooting, had followed the traditions of his class and had died with his lips locked on the name of his slayer.

Vociferously proclaiming these conditions, the police tacitly announced themselves "helpless"; and New York editors realized that this was to be another of those crimes of the Tenderloin district in which, in one of its conspicuous resorts, a killer slays his victim and, in the vernacular of his world, gets away with it.

The newspapers would continue to print columns about the murder, every day, and to shout for the arrest of the murderer. The police would report this clue and that clue and rumors would fly through the air like snowflakes in a Pittsburgh blizzard. City officials would solemnly give notice that the killer must be found. The killer would not be found. The jaw line of every managing editor in New York became more sharply defined. Every leading editorial writer reached for his pen. There had been far too much of this sort of thing. If only for the sake of the city's good name, the murderer of Dan Skelly must be found.

Aside from the outstanding facts that Skelly had been shot twice in the abdomen and had died of his wounds, authentic details of the case were amazingly few. Apparently it could not even be proved that the shooting had taken place in the Cockcrow, though Skelly had a private room there and had been found half unconscious in an alley at the rear of the club. He was "supposed" to have been in a card game, playing for big stakes; but thus far there was no information concerning the men who had been with him. It was "rumored" that a quarrel had developed over the cards and that Skelly had recently won the enmity of certain associates by welching over some big losses.

A policeman whose beat was just outside the club had thought he heard the sound of pistol-shots in the building. He had summoned a near-by fellow-officer and had evidently waited for the arrival of this reinforcement, for the two policemen had almost simultaneously reached the side of the dying man. Recognizing

the victim, the officer on the club beat had asked, "Who bumped you off, Dan?" And the dying man had gasped out, "There's a fat chance that I'll tell you!" That was the news end of Skelly's murder as it stood.

In the matter of Skelly's career the editors were better informed and made a good story of it, giving their readers vivid accounts of a many-sided personality. Skelly's friends and enemies were equally numerous and powerful. Incidents were related of his quickness, his keenness, his unerring memory for favors or for injuries. But over his fate hung the strange and sinister silence of the underworld. Sooner or later his friends would avenge him, but they would neither ask nor accept the help of the law; and least of all would they talk.

Barry read three leading newspapers before he started for the bank. Then from his sitting-room he called Janet on the telephone.

"All right this morning?" he cheerfully inquired when she responded.

"Well . . . I can't quite say that. I've had an awful night." Her voice trembled.

"Of course you have. I'm coming in to see you as soon as I leave the bank, about half-past four. In the meantime . . . May I make a suggestion?" he stopped to ask.

"You know you may."

"Then I'm going to advise you not to see any one else before I come. None of your friends, no one at all. Better not answer the bell or the telephone before four o'clock. Don't let Mrs. Perry do it, either. When

I come we'll talk things over. Is that understood?"

"Yes, I'll do anything you say."

"Thanks awfully. I'll give the General some instructions and explain to you later."

That morning, for the first time in his experience, Barry was ten minutes late at the bank. In view of this regrettable circumstance he was not surprised to receive, after the first morning rush was over, another invitation into the private office of Ward Howson.

When he entered this setting of a budding career, Howson was standing at a window, hands in pockets, his back to the room, staring unseeingly before him and so lost in thought that he did not hear Barry's approach. That his preoccupation was genuine was further revealed by the fact that he had forgotten to look like Uncle Alfred. He was merely a polo-player and a worried one.

"Have you seen the morning newspapers?" he asked without preface.

"Of course."

Howson strolled toward his desk, indicated with a nod a chair beside it, and dropped into his own seat with a sigh that was almost a groan.

"How'd you get away?" he asked.

"Skipped out of the rear exit, and was in a taxi two minutes after the shooting."

"You were lucky," Howson said enviously. "I had my aunt and cousin with me and my aunt weighs two hundred pounds. I might as well have tried to get the Flatiron Building unostentatiously out of the club. We headed straight into a policeman and I had to give

him fifty dollars and show him Auntie's white transformation before he'd let us move on."

"And the worst of it is," Barry sympathetically suggested, "that of course you'll feel it your duty to tell Uncle Alfred all about it."

Young Howson shook his head at him and grinned.

"Not this time," he said. "Not when Uncle Alfred's wife and beloved che-ild were there with me. I took them at the old girl's special request. She's muzzled me, all right. If there's any explanation to make to Uncle Alfred, she'll make it."

The reflection cheered him for a moment, but he drooped again.

"Just the same," he muttered, "I wish to the Lord she'd chosen some other night for that bat. There's going to be a lot of fine-combing in this case and I'm afraid we'll be caught in it. By the way, did you see anything? I noticed your table was right near Skelly's room."

"You notice everything," Barry said admiringly. "I heard the shots, of course, and saw a lot of men jump up at different tables. After that I was too busy getting out to see anything but the lights of Sixth Avenue."

"Did you save the pippin I saw you supporting on the dancing-floor?"

"No. I took the young lady I went with—the hostess of the party."

"Whose name," Howson murmured reflectively, "is Janet Perry. She's a stunning-looking girl but already quite a familiar figure in our gay circles. When I asked who she was, all the men within hearing answered like a

Greek chorus. She seems," he added sedately, "to be well known."

"See here, Howson, I'm going to tell you something." Barry drew his chair a little closer to his friend. "Janet Perry is one of the straightest girls I know. Don't grin; she really is. She comes from my home town—Wheaton, Massachusetts. She lived next door, and we've played together since we left our perambulators. When she came to New York I lost sight of her, till I discovered last spring that she and her aunt were living in my own apartment-house. Since then I've seen her often, but we've always gone out alone till last night. I knew she was hitting it up a bit, but I had no idea what a poisonous gang she had picked to train with. And now I confess that I'm awfully worried about her."

"Are you in love with her?" Howson's expression had changed. He seemed impressed by this confidential outburst from his reserved friend and he asked the question so simply that Barry answered it in the same way:

"No, I don't think I am. I think it's simply old friendship stuff—affection and habit. I'm awfully fond of the girl and awfully sorry for her. She's practically alone in the world, and she's never had a fair break. I feel responsible, too. I ought to have looked her up long ago."

Howson leaned back in his swivel-chair and fixed his eyes on the opposite wall. "I wonder if you realize that she's in love with you."

"Nonsense!" Barry spoke almost violently.

"No nonsense about it. I'm giving this to you straight. I watched her last night. When a man's with a family party," Howson interrupted himself to elucidate, "he's got to find his interest and amusement outside of it. So when I wasn't dutifully amusing Aunt Helen or my cousin Nancy I occasionally glanced at your table. I got an eyeful." He added impressively: "The girl's in love with you. Probably she has been in love with you all her life."

Barry groaned.

"For God's sake don't talk that way, Howson! You're absolutely wrong." He set his teeth. "But she's running with a rotten crowd," he went on more quietly, "and, as I said, I'm frightfully worried about her."

"There's a remedy." Getting his mind off his own troubles and on those of another man had a revivifying effect on the branch manager. His manner grew optimistic and paternal. "If you don't like her gang, get her out of it. She'll listen to anything you say," he predicted. He glanced at his watch and produced the dismissing nod of Uncle Alfred. "All right, Cabot, I won't keep you any longer. I just wanted to find out if you knew any more about last night's affair than I do."

Barry continued to worry about Janet Perry. He was amazed by the extent of his worry. He also worried about himself. If by any chance Janet and he were drawn into the Skelly case, it wouldn't do either of them any good. There was a question in the back of his mind, too, that he resolutely suppressed there. What was it Jennie Kershaw had said about the men who played with Skelly? Had she really mentioned . . .

He worried until he dropped into Janet's apartment at five o'clock that afternoon and found her alone with her aunt. Immediately thereafter he ceased to worry so much. He was interested in the phenomenon but had no time to analyze it. As soon as he was seated Mrs. Perry again showed the tact which had endeared her to her niece's associates, and drifted from the room. As he rose to open the door for her Barry hoped her own room was a pleasant one, for it was clear that she spent most of her time in it. He had always appreciated Mrs. Perry's surprising ability to sink into the background. His childish memory of her called up merely a vague shadow and a book. Now he saw her as a noiseless feminine presence walking toward or vanishing through doorways.

"It's awfully good of you to come," Janet said gratefully. "But I was sure you would. I've stayed in all day and I haven't seen a soul, though the gang has been calling and telephoning ever since eleven this morning."

"Did you get any sleep?" Now that he had taken them in, Barry was shocked by her pallor and strained expression.

"Of course not." She shivered. "I didn't dare keep my eyes shut. As soon as I closed them I saw that bleeding, dying man or that horrible cat-like creature in the cab with us. Barry!" her voice rose almost hysterically, "do you think that man—the one in the cab, I mean—had anything to do with the shooting?"

"Why should he have had?" Barry spoke with successful casualness. He was vastly relieved. She had not

seen the man behind Skelly. "I've no doubt he was at the club, just as we were, and that he was as anxious to get away," he went on. "But you mustn't forget there were several hundred people in that place, last night, all scurrying for cover. No one wants to be drawn into a case like this. If we'd gone toward Broadway we'd have run into more of them. That's the reason I headed for Sixth Avenue."

"But we saw Skelly . . . we *saw* him standing there . . ." Again her voice sharpened.

"Get your mind off that. Don't let yourself think of it at all or of 'the cat,' either. There's no reason to think he had any more to do with the affair than we had."

Barry didn't know why he had spoken of their cab companion as "the cat." Probably merely because Janet had done so, and because it seemed a fitting label for that tense, crouched, strange-eyed personality.

"What I mean is," Janet faltered, "we may be called as witnesses."

"I don't think so. No one else knows that we saw Skelly. No one else need ever know. Do you understand, Janet?" His voice underlined the question and she looked confused.

"Do you mean that we've got to lie about it?"

"No, I don't. If we're put into the witness-chair we'll tell the truth, of course. My point is that we needn't be put into the witness-chair, for no one else knows we saw anything. I know you did, because I looked at you. You know I did, because I'm admitting it to you. I don't intend to let any one else know it. We were the

only ones who sat directly facing Skelly when he staggered out of that room. If any of the rest saw him, they were too much excited to think of any one but him and themselves. They can't possibly prove that we saw him, even if they think we did. There's no reason why we should take any one else into our confidence. Besides, what could they prove by us? No one denies that Skelly's dead! You get the point, don't you, Janet?"

"Perfectly. No one will get anything from me."

"Good." He remembered another point. "Have you said anything about the affair to Mrs. Perry?"

"Not a word."

"How does she account for your being around so early this morning?—and for all these newspapers? I'd get rid of them if I were you. If any of your little friends has prattled and some officer comes here to find out whether or not you know anything, so many newspapers on the floor will look suggestive."

"I'll burn them. As to Aunt Anne, she merely thinks I drank too much last night and was sick. I was, too."

He was sitting facing her and he met her eyes in a long look while his heart dropped like lead in deep soundings. Those were such strange words to come from Janet Perry.

"It's a far cry from Wheaton and the old days, isn't it, Jan?" he asked with a sigh.

She nodded, for a moment speechless. Her lips quivered and she set them hard.

"What I can't forgive myself for," she broke out violently, "and I'll *never* forgive myself for it, is dragging you into this infernal mess! You've always kept

yourself so fine and clean. And then I come along. . . .
I . . . I . . .”

“Hush. All this business has got on your nerves; and no wonder,” he soothed. “But even so, my dear girl, the one thing that you ought to realize is that you *don't* have to worry about me.”

She gave him a kindled look.

“You're wonderful, Barry. I believe you'd be equal to anything. It must be great to be so sure of oneself,” she added wistfully.

“I'm not sure of myself. I'm very modest.”

Janet smiled. Barry was glad to see that she could do it.

“I can tell you from the modest violet, at the very first glance,” she lightly assured him.

“It's because I'm so much more modest than the violet that you can,” he pointed out. “A violet would seem an arrogant thing beside me. Now let's see if there's anything new in the evening papers.”

He had brought several of these with him and he and Janet went over them together. Under their big head-lines the journals offered virtually nothing the morning editions had not already printed, and the unconscious pathos of the rewritten stories was equaled only in the columns of the press the next morning when once more the now stale facts, with no important additions, were rehashed for the expectant reading public. Equally unaware of and indifferent to the anguish of editors, Janet and Barry read every line in every journal, after which the young man put both the morning and the evening copies on the blazing logs in

Janet's fireplace and laid fresh fuel over their charred remains.

"How much did you spend for me last night?" Janet abruptly asked when that task was finished.

"Nothing; not a cent."

"Barry, please don't take that attitude. It was my party. I dragged you to it, and I certainly will not let you pay for it, in addition to everything else. How much was it?"

"I give you my word I don't know. I didn't keep an account and I haven't thought of it since."

"Well, I have thought of it and this morning I figured out about what it would be. I ought to know," she added wearily. "I've given those parties often enough to learn." She went to her desk and came back with a handful of bank-notes. "That's my last party of the kind," she added as she offered him the notes, "and I want to pay for it, myself. If you're still the friend you've always been, you'll let me do it. Leave me that much self-respect, at least."

He took the money and thrust it into a pocket.

"Do you mean that?" he asked eagerly. "Do you really mean that this was the last night-club party?"

"Do you think I could ever have another, after what happened?"

He didn't answer, for he didn't know. He was amazed by the uprush of relief he experienced, but under it lay a suspicion that she might forget that experience sooner than she expected.

"I don't think we'll be troubled by the police," he confidently predicted as they returned to their chairs

before the fire. "That gang of yours has one redeeming quality, in my opinion," he went on frankly. "No one in it is looking for trouble and they've all learned to keep their mouths shut. It's about the first lesson the Tenderloin teaches its pupils, and you've only to look at the newspapers to find out how well a lot of them have learned it," he added, with the boyish grin that always carried his companion back to Wheaton.

Janet reverted to her earlier anxiety.

"I'm not worried about myself, at all, but I'm most terribly worried about you." She added emphatically: "I'm really through. Last night's affair gave me a frightful jolt, but it taught me a big lesson, too. I'm going to cut out the clubs entirely and get rid of that gang as soon as I can. Of course I can't do it overnight." She added a prediction which revealed her intimate understanding of her new associates: "They'll fade away, themselves, as soon as they see that I'm not going to spend any more money on them."

He got up to go, and took both her hands as she rose with him.

"Good girl," he said approvingly. "If you stick to that resolution last night's experience will be worth while, no matter what develops."

"If anything develops that hurts you or interferes with your career I'll never forgive myself," she repeated on a quick breath.

"It will take a lot more than our visit to the Cockcrow to hurt me or interfere with my career." Barry turned and laughed back at her with the arrogance of youth as he closed the door: and only a little later he

wondered how he could have been at once so cock-sure and so ignorant.

His first enlightenment came after dinner that evening, in the form of a man in civilian clothes who briefly explained that he was from "headquarters" and immediately revealed himself as an earnest seeker after truth. Barry, who had taken time to think between the General's telephoned announcement of his caller and the caller's authoritative rap on his sitting-room door, welcomed the officer with mild surprise but entire hospitality and Detective Hennessy softened a trifle under this tactful treatment. But he put into his breast pocket the cigar Barry offered him and he made it clear that no time was to be lost. He was a big man with a heavy jaw and cold gray eyes.

"Mr. Cabot," he began crisply, when the two were seated, "I understand you was at the Cockcrow last night. That's straight, ain't it?"

"Yes, I was there."

"With a lady?"

"With several ladies," Barry grinned, "and a large number of gentlemen. In fact, I blew into a bunch of strangers I'd never seen before. I couldn't give you their names to save my life."

"We'll let it go at that," Hennessy agreed, and added portentously, "for the time. What I'm after, an' *all* I'm after, Mr. Cabot," he added, "is to find out whether you know anything about the killin' that come off there a little after three this mornin'."

"I heard two shots fired," Barry admitted. "I sup-

pose every one in the place did. Then the lights went out and I hit the high spots. I must have been almost the first person out of the building."

"I guess you didn't beat Dan Skelly, at that," said Hennessy, with meaning. He gave the comment time to sink in and then added, "Did you see Skelly—or any one else near his room?"

"As I said, the lights were put out almost simultaneously with the pistol-shots. I'm not very familiar with night clubs, but I suppose that's the usual procedure in such cases. Earlier in the evening I had noticed a corridor near our table, and I made for it in the darkness and found an exit into an alley. I found it because the door was at the end of the corridor and I bumped into it. When I got outside I ran to Sixth Avenue and was lucky enough to pick up a passing taxicab."

"An' was you alone all this time?"

"I was not. I had a lady with me—the only one in the crowd I'd ever seen before. I hope, Officer, you won't ask me to give you her name. It would only hurt her and it wouldn't do you any good."

The young man spoke with disarming friendliness, but Hennessy's cold eyes did not soften.

"An' what makes you so sure of that?"

Barry looked at the big detective. How much did he know?

"She was with me every second. She couldn't see any better in the dark than I could," he muttered.

"An' neither of you," said Hennessy, softly, "saw poor Dan Skelly standin' right in front of you an'

tryin' to keep in his guts with his hands. That's strange. Come now, Mr. Cabot," he added briskly, "pour the syrup! We know you got it."

"You mean," the young man stared at him in amazement, "that Skelly was shot in the restaurant, near our table? But how could that be?" He added after a moment of seemingly stunned thought: "The shots certainly seemed near us. But the lights went out so quickly."

Hennessy looked at him and nodded.

"I see," he rejoined without resentment. "That's your story an' you'll stick to it. An' I suppose the lady will tell the same."

"Naturally she will." Barry spoke with his first air of reserve. "She'll have to, since she doesn't see any better in the dark than I do." He had the manner of one still courteous but a bit fed up.

Hennessy got to his feet.

"All right. I think I'll look in next door an' have a little talk with her," he announced.

"Now, I ask you as man to man, what the devil's the sense of that?" Barry cried disgustedly. "Listen, Mr. Hennessy." He followed his visitor to the door. "A murder was committed and every one knows it. The victim died without telling who shot him and every one knows that. The bunch in the room with him knows exactly who shot him, and you fellows must know who his intimates were and you must be able to make a pretty good guess at who had a grudge against him and who bumped him off. Yet here you are, following up a little bunch of casual visitors to the club, who wouldn't

have known Skelly if he had come and sat at their table. And, by Jove, you seem to be hinting that he did!"

Barry became aware that he was letting his temper run away with him and he changed his tone.

"My point is this, Officer," he went on with a deprecating grin, edging past the detective till his back was against the door: "we can't help you, but you can do us a lot of harm and get nothing out of it. The young lady you spoke of belongs to a good family and she's a fine girl. She was having a little fling and she has already told me she's through with that sort of amusement. Naturally, to find herself in a place while a murder was being committed was a big shock to her and she hasn't got over it. As for me, I'm in a downtown bank. The fact that till last night I hadn't been in a night club for almost two years won't help me if I'm dragged into this nasty business. You get the general idea, don't you?"

Hennessy nodded again. He had listened patiently and without interruption. Now he laid a large and well-shaped hand on the young man's arm.

"Sure I get you," he said good-humoredly, and emphasized his further points with taps of a big forefinger. "But there's a whole lot about this case you don't understand, Mr. Cabot, an' some of them parties at your table may know more about it than you think. You got some surprises comin' to you. It's hard luck for you," he added regretfully, "that your table happened to be the only one in the club that was right in line with that hall an' mighty close to it. Dan Skelly

couldn't have been much more than seven or eight feet away from you when he come out of his room into the hall; an' he must of stood swingin' back and forth there for all of ten seconds before he could get up steam to make for the exit, which was the same one you an' the lady used. He was crumpled up against the wall in the alley when the first police got there, an' you must of gone right past him. But you didn't see him!"

"I wasn't looking around," Barry said quietly. "All I was thinking about was getting the lady and myself as far from the Cockcrow as I could, and we ran through that alley like rabbits. Besides, you must remember that there had been a lot of drinking going on. One isn't one's brightest, most observant self after such an evening. And there was a row going on at our table at the very minute of the shots."

Hennessy shook his big head.

"I know just how you feel, Mr. Cabot," he admitted, "an' you're puttin' up a pretty good front, at that. But it'd be better if you'd pull the trigger instead of stallin'. Think it over. In the meantime I'll have a little chat with the lady." He moved Barry aside with a firm hand and opened the door.

"May I go with you?"

Hennessy hesitated.

"I don't see any reason why you shouldn't," he decided, "if you'll keep quiet. I don't want interruptions or promptin', y'understand. I an' the young lady will do the talkin'."

"All right." Barry's mind was very busy. He had heard and read all sorts of charges against the New

York police. Perhaps a couple of hundred would square this thing with Hennessy, since his own part and Jan's in the affair had been so trivial. But Hennessy did not look like the sort of man who accepts bribes and a proffered bribe might make Hennessy think him guilty of the murder itself! In any case, he'd ask the advice of some good authority before he offered one.

Hennessy had passed into the hall with steps remarkably quick and light for so large a man. He was ringing the electric bell of the Perry apartment before Barry reached his side.

"Hold on!" cried the latter. "Hadn't we better telephone from my room that you're coming?"

Hennessy's stern lips relaxed.

"P'raps that's the ettykit of your set, young fella, but it don't pervail in ours. It's all right, though," he added generously. "The young lady expect's me."

It was clear that the young lady did. Janet herself opened the door and showed no surprise at seeing the big man. Her face brightened, however, when she recognized his companion.

"Miss Perry, this is Detective Hennessy of Police Headquarters," Barry broke in before the officer could speak. "He has come to ask you some questions about last night." He thought the slight formality might ease the strain of the situation, for Janet looked pale and nervous.

"That'll be about all from you, my lad," Hennessy remarked severely, leading the way into the living-room, from which the considerate Mrs. Perry was just retreating. All three caught the swish of her

black-satin skirt as she vanished through an open door.

"My aunt," Janet explained to the officer. "She doesn't know anything about this affair," she added, "and I hope she won't have to."

In the interview that followed, Barry found himself admiring both Janet and the detective. Though he looked the part, in manner Hennessy was a far cry from the detective of fiction or the stage. There was nothing hectoring or domineering about him, nor did he make any effort to be suave. He was entirely civil and very businesslike, and his questions were straight to the point. He offered the girl a chair and Barry immediately drew another forward and sat down. The detective took a seat facing them both.

"Now, Miss Perry," he began crisply as he had done with Barry, "you was at the Cockcrow last night, wasn't you?"

"Yes, I was."

"You was givin' a little party there; or was it this young gentleman's party?"

"It was my party. This gentleman was a stranger to every one in the crowd but myself. He came in at the last minute."

"Just before the killin'?"

"No. I mean that he dropped in here to make a call before we all left for the club, and I invited him to go with us."

"Would you mind givin' me the list of your guests, Miss Perry?"

"I'd much rather not. They were there simply for amusement. They know nothing about the crime, and of

course they won't want their names brought in."

"I got their names, all right." Hennessy impassively produced a list. "I just want 'em O.K.'d by you. I'll read 'em one by one an' you can check as I go."

He read the list, glancing at her after each name and checking it as she nodded.

"Now, Miss Perry—" his manner grew confidential—"I got to say what I been sayin' to Mr. Cabot here. In one way it's unfortunate your table was so close to that hall and to Dan Skelly's private room. You was right in line when Skelly come out into the hall. You was the only two facin' that hall, with your back to the big room, an' you both must of seen him. But that ain't the point. What I want to know—" he shot the question at her like a bullet—"was any one with him or followin' him?"

Barry's heart-beats stopped. Would she fall into that simple trap? She did not.

"Why, Mr. Hennessy," she said, "the lights went right out and it was pitch-dark. Didn't Mr. Cabot tell you? It was so dark I didn't even know it was Mr. Cabot who had caught my hand and was pulling me along. I was frightened till I heard his voice. Then I let him guide me and we ran till we reached the street."

"I know all about the lights goin' out," Hennessy assured her. "Mr. Cabot has mentioned them. An' I know *when* they went out," he added with emphasis. "You both had plenty of time to see Skelly an' any one else that was with him or near him. What I'm askin' is, *did* you?"

Janet shuddered.

"If I had seen any murder, I'd be having nervous prostration now. But I thought Mr. Skelly was shot in the card-room."

Hennessy shook his head at her, but his air of conviction had given way to uncertainty. With infinite relief, Barry realized that the big detective was no longer so sure as he had been that these young things had seen the dying gambler swaying on his feet. Barry was glad he had made that point about the drinking. It was natural enough that the whole crowd should be fuddled. Hennessy rose and restored the list of guests to his pocket.

"Maybe your mem'ries will improve," he suggested, but without conviction. "You'll have another chance to talk, in a day or two."

He turned to Barry, whom he had ignored in the interview up till now.

"When you grabbed the lady an' ran in the dark—" he ironically underlined the last three words, for the fruitlessness of this visit was getting on his nerves—"did you by any chance see a big man near you? A man as big as I am," Hennessy amplified, "but thinner, and with black eyes and a dark skin,"

"I give you my word, Officer," Barry asserted positively, "that I didn't see another person near us while I was grabbing the lady and running in the dark, as you put it. It was pitch-dark. She's just told you so. There might have been others running near us down the hall, but there must be a lot of exits and perhaps the rest had too much sense to plunge into a dark corridor where a murderer might be lurking. I'd have

hesitated, myself, if I had thought of that," he ended reflectively.

Hennessy waved a tolerant hand.

"All right, all *right*," he said wearily. "'Tis said that Tony the Cat was at your heels, makin' his own getaway. A feather's heavy compared to Tony's footsteps, an' a shadow ain't in it with him for quickness and quiet. But if you'd seen him last night, I'm thinkin' you'd remember him."

Barry dared not glance at Janet.

"An' that reminds me," Hennessy added suddenly, as the others remained silent. "You sat all night facin' that hallway. Did you notice any one, before the shootin', goin' into or leavin' Skelly's room?"

"I may have seen a few waiters," Barry said with a slight impatience. "But here's something that really ought to interest you, Hennessy. The bills for champagne and cocktails at our table last night were over three hundred dollars. How much do you think any of us saw except champagne and cocktail glasses and our dancing partners?"

Hennessy smiled.

"You're good, Mr. Cabot," he admiringly admitted. "I like to hear you talk."

"Thanks. Suppose you talk some, now. Is the man you call Tony the Cat the man the police think killed Skelly?"

Hennessy looked at him with a glint of humor in his cold eyes.

"We think a whole lot of things," he said grimly. "We think Tony Bosco and his brother Jim was

with Skelly, an' we may be wrong at that. There was a dozen men in and out of the room between eleven o'clock an' the murder, an' if we offered a million for their names we'd not get them, for what good is a million to a dead man? But the next few days the papers will print 'rumors' that Jim Bosco an' Brian Strong and Jack-knife Casey and 'Ten Grand' Mantell an' Tony the Cat was there, an' a few others, an' much good it'll do the papers. We can't shut up men on 'rumors.' Good night to you."

He had turned toward the door during this unexpected oration and it was well for the listeners that he did, for he missed the swift change in Cabot's face. Barry opened the door for him and got a curt nod for his trouble. Hennessy went downstairs with his light step, and Barry, closing the door, stood with his back to it, staring at Janet, who had risen and come forward facing him.

"Tony the Cat," she said in a strangled voice. "Oh Barry!"

He caught her and helped her back to a chair near the fire, giving her a gentle shake before he seated her.

"Pull yourself together," he ordered. "Even if that was Tony the Cat," he hated to put his lips to the words, "and even if he was with Skelly, there's no present reason to think he did the shooting. You heard Hennessy say Jim Bosco was there, too, and half a dozen others . . . and . . . Brian Strong. *Brian Strong!*"

She was struck by his repetition of the last name.

"Who's Brian Strong?" she asked but without great

interest. He could see that her thoughts were still on Tony the Cat.

Barry hesitated and dropped into a chair, for his legs were shaking. He was not really surprised. Subconsciously he had expected something like this. The ghastly irony of life called for it. That suppressed question in his mind was answered. He had a queer feeling, before he spoke, that the pause was vital; that he was putting into his reply a confession of faith of which the consequences might be far-reaching.

"Brian Strong?" he brought out at last. "He's a friend of mine. And I'll say," he added almost solemnly, "that the one sure thing in this beastly business is that Brian Strong did *not* kill Skelly."

CHAPTER VI

BARRY HEARS A CALL

HENNESSY was well informed about the policy of the newspapers. Their columns during the next week fulfilled his predictions. For the first time since the day of the murder the case offered something new and the editors played it up with unction. Incidentally they played safe. The Boscós, Ed Wallis, Brian Strong, "Ten Grand" Mantell, and several others whose names were given were "said" to have played cards with Skelly at the Cockcrow the night of the murder. It was "said" there had been trouble among the gamblers, and that charges of welching on his recent losses, which had been huge, had been made against Skelly.

The two Boscós alone were "said" to have won a hundred thousand dollars from Skelly in recent games and to have vainly waited many weeks for their money. Skelly was "rumored" to have accused the Boscós of crooked playing, and to have sat in the games of the fatal night only to convince the Boscós that he had never made such charges. The presence of the two Bosco henchmen, Jack-knife Casey and the Feather-bed, also "said" to be in Skelly's room, was explained on the theory that possibly they were there to protect their bosses. But why, the editorial writers wanted to

know, should the gamblers kill their debtor? Alive, he might eventually pay them. Dead, he was a total loss.

Barry was not vastly interested in the Boscós, though a slight chill ran down his spine when half-tone reproductions of the face of Tony the Cat stared at him from the first page of the newspapers, revealing the unforgettable features of the man who had followed Skelly into the corridor and had pushed after Barry into the taxicab. Sick at heart, young Cabot was concentrating on what was printed about Brian Strong, in the various journals. It was not much. One reporter expressed surprise at the presence of Strong in such a galère. Strong was supposed to be a straight player and an habitu   of places where straight games were played.

He might, the reporter thought, have been drawn in that particular night, as a peacemaker and adjuster of difficulties between Skelly and the Boscós. It appeared that he had acted in some such capacity in squabbles among other gamblers. The editors centered their attention on the Boscós. The brothers, Italian-born but in America since "Big Jim" was eight and Tony three, had been brought up in New York's gutters and had affiliations and influence both in gambling circles and in the underworld, where they were said to head a group doing a brisk international business in the smuggling and sale of narcotics. The Boscós always traveled together and there was supposed to be an unusually strong fraternal bond between them.

Barry was again a trifle late at the bank one morning and the eloquent expression of his fellow-workers suggested that they knew why. He went through his duties

almost perfunctorily. It had been his theory, frequently expressed, that concentration on one's work could banish any personal worries; but to-day his worries got off into a mental corner and persistently considered themselves. While he looked at checks, counted out money, asked and answered questions, he reviewed Strong's possible position as well as Janet's and his own.

Both of the latter, he mentally admitted, were infernally uncomfortable. His was serious enough to put a stop to any young banker's career. Even Ward Howson, with Uncle Alfred back of him, was disturbed over his mere presence in the Cockcrow that night, and Ward's experience as escort to his aunt and cousin had been a gambol in a kindergarten compared with Barry's. He felt that he needed a long talk with some man wiser and older than himself and he decided that Colonel Nicholas Jessup would be the right person. Later, he'd get in touch with Wheeler, the newspaper man who had given Ward Howson so much information.

Barry called up Colonel Jessup at noon and received an invitation to dine with him that evening. He liked the old fellow, and at the Jessup table, at eight o'clock, he found himself slightly relaxing for the first time. The Colonel's big and lonely house was something of a mausoleum, but the food was always good and the pre-war vintages were excellent. Despite the passage of the Eighteenth Amendment, Jessup dined as he had always dined, with a cocktail as a starter, a glass of sherry to go on with, a glass of champagne with his bird, and a brandy liqueur with his coffee. His cellar

had been famous and these slight inroads had no apparent effect on it.

Ten years ago Jessup's physicians had warned him that he must cut down the eating and drinking which were his sole weaknesses, but the Colonel had ignored the advice and at seventy-eight was still going strong. Forty years ago he had been in love with Marcia Cabot, who was then a very different person from the brisk spinster Barry remembered. Now the old man liked her nephew and was rather flattered that the youngster was willing to waste time on a near-octogenarian.

When Barry admitted that he had come for advice in "a sort of jam," his host was increasingly flattered. They chatted of unimportant matters during dinner, while the old butler was coming and going, but after the meal Jessup led his guest into the library, with a gleam of excitement in his faded eyes. That this exemplary youth had got into a "jam" of any kind interested him. He suspected that there was a woman in it. He established Barry before the open fire with plenty of cigarettes within reach, and looked expectant.

"I'm going to tell you the whole yarn," Barry began, and to the Colonel's surprise went back to his boyhood. He described the day of fishing, J. C. Bleeker's effect on his subsequent career, his hero-worship, and the gambler's reappearance in New York. "The man's been a dominating figure all through my life," he interpolated. He let the Colonel get the jolt of Strong's profession as he himself had got it. He also dwelt on his own childhood friendship and recent experiences

with Janet Perry, and his host warmed into animation.

"I saw a good deal of that girl when she first came to New York," he interrupted. "And I wondered once or twice why you were fighting so shy of her. She told me she never saw you. Then I thought I knew, and that's why I didn't speak of her. I decided that you felt she wouldn't fit into your life here, and you'd have been right. She isn't your sort and she was bound to come a cropper."

"No, it wasn't a question of self-preservation." Barry was thinking it out as he spoke. "I suppose it might have been, possibly, if I'd known the sort of life she was living. But you see, I didn't. She hadn't been like that when I knew her. The only reason I didn't take time to look her up was that I was too infernally self-absorbed. I felt a sense of obligation toward her and I didn't want her on my mind. Now I wish to God I'd got in touch with her as soon as I came here. I could have found her by taking a little trouble, and perhaps I could have put on the brakes. I don't know."

"I haven't seen her for a year," Jessup reflected. "It was easy enough then to tell what she was heading for. Too bad! She's amazingly pretty; and there must have been something fine in her, for your aunt liked her."

He added the final words as if they were a decoration for the girl, as in his opinion they were. Barry resumed his story, and when he brought in his first interview with young Howson, and Uncle Alfred's prediction, Jessup looked thoughtful. The long narrative omitted only all mention of Tony the Cat. It ended with the visit of Hennessy and the revelations in the

morning newspapers, and the old man's face as he listened grew very serious.

"You chose the right word when you described the situation," he commented. "A 'jam' is what it is."

"That's the way it looks to me," Barry admitted. "What do you advise?"

"Sit tight, as you're doing. That's all you can do just now."

"Do you think I ought to try to square Hennessy—for the present, anyway?"

"No. If he's straight, as a lot of them are, it will annoy him. If he isn't straight, it will convince him that you've got something serious to hide, and he'll bleed you white."

"That's what I think. But I didn't like his cryptic remarks about my having some surprises coming."

"They're always making cryptic remarks. Cryptic remarks are their stock in trade. Don't let them worry you." The old man's momentary seriousness was passing. He smiled and nodded toward the cigarette-box on the table at his guest's elbow. In the ardor of his recital Barry had let his cigarette go out.

"Do you think I ought to talk to a lawyer about this affair?" he asked as he lighted another cigarette. Telling the story had relieved his mind. He was almost sure he had been making mountains out of mole-hills.

"Not yet. Probably you won't have to do it at all. As far as I can see, you're 'sitting pretty'! But of course you understand the whole situation. The underworld knows exactly who killed Skelly, and how and why it was done, but of course the police can't get a thing out

of any one who knows, and the police are desperate. There's been too much of this casual murdering and getting away with it. The newspapers are making an awful howl. So the police are looking for a victim, a lamb for the slaughter. And unless I miss my guess," he added, his face sobering again, "they'll find one."

"You mean . . . they'll frame some one?"

"They will . . . or the gangsters will. The gangsters may toss the police something to satisfy them and the newspapers, and to save the real culprit, who is evidently a leader among them. It won't be the first time that's been done. I knew Tom Osborne pretty well," he went on retrospectively. "He told me that while he was doing that altruistic stunt of his as warden of Sing Sing Prison three men that he was absolutely convinced were innocent died in the electric chair."

"Do you think he was right?"

"He may have been. It's entirely possible."

"That makes one feel rather sick." Barry drew a quick breath. Again he was thinking of Brian Strong. He told himself he was always thinking of Brian Strong, when he wasn't thinking of Janet or of Dan Skelly or of Tony the Cat. Strange thoughts these for a mind trained to think in figures!

"It does." Jessup was speaking. "There are a good many things in our civilization that make one feel rather sick, my boy. You'll notice that more as you grow older."

For a long time they sat in a companionable silence, smoking and staring at the fire. Barry wondered why as a kid he hadn't liked the Colonel better. The answer was

not hard to find. Jessup had mellowed with the years, like his good wines. The young man looked around with a sigh of relaxation. This was the sort of atmosphere in which he was at home. The library was evidently the room in which the Colonel spent most of his evenings, and it was free from the austere loneliness of the rest of the house. The old man's books lined its walls and family portraits of the Jessups hung above them—finely painted portraits representing a dignified clan of men and women who had lent honor and distinction to their time. Too fine a clan to be allowed to die out as the last member was letting it do.

The portrait of Colonel Jessup's mother hung in the place of honor over the mantel and Barry looked at it admiringly. He knew that the original of that portrait had been a beauty and a belle in her day and that she had stood to the end of her life for the finest traditions of her New England race. Yes, this was where he belonged, Barry reflected as he studied the portrait. That was the type of woman he admired, and the fine old chap sitting on the other side of the fireplace was the type of man he admired. There had never been even the suggestion of a stain on Colonel Nicholas Jessup's business or social record. That was what Barry wanted, he reminded himself. Achievement, dignity, and the tranquillity of an ordered life were the things he had always wanted.

He had never known how precious these things were until he compared them now with the lives of those who squandered life. How far he himself had wandered, in one short week, from the kind of life he had

always known! The sickness he felt, and which he had just admitted, was a sort of nostalgia—the sickness of a small boy, far from home, and on a dark and lonely road. He could almost have cried out under the intensity of the realization of what he had possibly let himself in for. His nerves were suddenly and agonizingly on end. With a quick setting of his jaws he called the little panic to heel and his black moment passed.

He lent himself again to the enveloping peace of the quiet and beautiful room and the companionship of his host. Heretofore, in their evenings together, he had always been conscious of Colonel Jessup's age as a wall between them. They had chatted agreeably across the wall, but it had been there. In this hour, for the first time, he no longer felt the presence of this sturdy masonry of the years. It was down, and there was a sustaining sense in the knowledge. All the barriers between them were down. Barry knew that if trouble came to him, Colonel Nicholas Jessup would stand by as his own father would have done, and just as understandingly. His thoughts swung back to Janet, but his eyes were still on the portrait above the mantel, and now his host, glancing at it, too, spoke again.

"God doesn't seem to be creating women like that any more," he observed.

"Your mother was unique, of course. Aunt Marcia always said so and I've heard it from others. There can't be many like her, as you say; but I suppose there must be some who still stand for the creed she followed."

"And there are thousands of women in the society around us to whom the standards of women like my mother and Marcia Cabot are just so much Greek. Barry!" The old man spoke so abruptly that his guest started. "Are you interested in that Perry girl?"

"Very much, Colonel."

"Are you in love with her?"

"No. . . . At least I don't think I am," Barry added with less conviction. "I'm trying to find out," he went on slowly. "She's on my mind most of the time, if that means anything."

"Good Lord, boy, you ought to *know*!" Jessup said almost irritably.

"A week ago I'd have told you there wasn't a chance of it, and I'd have thought I was right. But since this mess we're in came up I've been amazed by the extent of my anxiety about Janet. I've always been fond of her, though I didn't take the trouble to look her up when I came to New York. But I was surprisingly glad to see her when we met again. We have a lot of memories in common, and of course there's the strong habit of our early association. I thought that was all there was to it. Lately she has offended my taste in a lot of ways, and I needn't tell you that I loathe the sort of life she's been living.

"All that being so," he summed up with a sigh, "I've been thinking of her pretty steadily lately and even lying awake to do it. And just now I don't mind saying I'm scared to death for fear she's going to be drawn into this Skelly affair. I must be more interested than I realized or I shouldn't worry so much. Besides, God

knows my own side of it gives me worry enough. I don't want to care for Janet," he broke out abruptly. "One reason I wanted to come here to-night was that it would keep me from going to see her."

Jessup sighed.

"Young fellows were different in my day," he contributed. "By God, if we were in love we knew it! You won't mind my saying I hope you're not in love with Janet Perry. I can't imagine anything more disastrous happening to you than for you to marry her, and I fancy you know it." As Barry did not answer this, he changed his tone and the subject.

"Like a little double solitaire?"

They played from ten till eleven o'clock, which was the Colonel's bedtime.

When Barry reached home he was not wholly surprised to hear the sounds of revelry coming from the next apartment. He and Janet had agreed that the gang must be welcomed once or twice, if only to avoid arousing their enmity. She was right, too, no doubt, in her assumption that they would soon fall away when she ceased to be their hostess and banker. The tragic episode at the Cockcrow had given her a good excuse for a waning interest in night clubs and her companions there. Moreover, it was clear from Hennessy's list that some of the bunch had not followed their circle's excellent rule of a clamped jaw in the face of trouble. They had prattled, and they would naturally assume that Janet's changed attitude was at least partly explained by her resentment of their prattle.

Subconsciously Barry must have cranked up his mind, for it was working its hardest and now it proceeded to make again the dreary round of the Cockcrow episode as well as a review of his talk with Colonel Jessup and his worry over Brian Strong. He was in bed when Janet's guests left, and he was mildly relieved when he heard the voice of the hostess in the hall, bidding them good night. But he had not been really anxious as to her course in that little matter. She might not keep her resolution indefinitely, but he was sure that for the present night clubs had lost their lure for her.

He had arranged with the General to bring him half a dozen leading newspapers early every morning, and he was awake at six, after a restless night, when he heard the thump of the dropped journals outside his door. He got out of bed and, opening the door, took them in. Simultaneously the Perry's door yawned and Janet appeared on the threshold, reaching out for a corresponding assortment of newspapers. Conscious of pajamas and dressing-gowns, both darted back, but first they had exchanged a weary-eyed glance that was full of eloquence.

Barry rolled up the dark window shades, slipped back into bed, propped himself comfortably with pillows, and sent a questing glance over the morning headlines, passing with an eye-flash all that did not refer to the Skelly murder. It was immediately clear that there was no abatement of interest in the case. It was also clear that the journalistic shriek for the arrest of the murderer was louder and more far-reaching than ever.

Police and city officials were heeding it. The police department had received an ultimatum from the mayor, promising an epoch-making shake-up unless the murderer could be produced in three days. The police were throwing out nets for the two Boscós, for Jack-knife Casey and the Featherbed, for Brian Strong and "Ten Grand" Mantell, the last-named a well-known gambler who was said to play for no starting-stake less than ten thousand dollars, and who was known to be one of Skelly's big creditors. Ironically the morning journals summed up the known facts to date.

It was known that Dan Skelly had been shot twice and had died of his wounds without revealing the name of his murderer. It was known that two shots had been fired in the Cockcrow Club about the time Skelly was shot. Many guests in the club that night had admitted having heard these shots and they had also been heard by a policeman standing near the club entrance, who, with a fellow-officer, had discovered Skelly dying of his wounds in an alley just outside a rear entrance of the club building. It was known that Skelly kept one of the private rooms in the club for his own use and frequently gambled there. It was supposed but could not be proved that he had played there the night of the shooting.

It was rumored but could not be proved that Skelly's associates were the two Boscós, Brian Strong, "Ten Grand" Mantell, and gangsters already mentioned. It was rumored but could not be proved that trouble existed between Skelly and the Boscós because Skelly had presumably welched on his losses, and it was now ru-

mored that the two Boscos were Skelly's heaviest creditors and that the amount due them was even more than the hundred thousand dollars first mentioned.

In short, much was rumored, but little could be proved, and all the gentlemen concerned had been amazingly elusive since the night of the murder. Not one of them had appeared in his usual haunts, but the police claimed to know where they were and promised to produce any one of them against whom there was credible evidence. The police commissioner was haggard, profane, and singularly curt with reporters. The Boscos, he asserted, were right here in New York where he could put his hands on them. Brian Strong was in Philadelphia, also within reach of those efficient hands. He did not claim to know the exact whereabouts of Jack-knife Casey and the Featherbed, but they were not important. They were merely handy men for the Boscos and had run their errands. He spoke feelingly of "Ten Grand" Mantell, on whom, he said, the police were keeping a fixed and steady eye. "Ten Grand," it appeared, was the closest friend of Brian Strong, and shared with him the reputation of a peacemaker and a square player.

One morning ten days after the murder, and almost before Barry's wicket was open for business, a check was thrust through it, clutched in a talon-like hand that seemed afraid to release the bit of paper. Without looking at the check, Barry glanced at the owner of the hand, and as he met the colorless eyes on the other side of the wicket a slight chill slithered down his spine. He

had not heard the man approach and now he knew why.

"Boss said y'd know me," an urgent and husky voice assured him. "Saw yuh at de nose-bag wit him once. Boss wants dis kale."

Barry slowly unfolded the check and took his time to study it. Meanwhile Dink the Shadow made it clear that he was not used to banks. He was as noiseless as his nickname suggested, but he changed his stance from foot to foot like a soft-sole dancer and his thin features twitched with nervousness.

"Boss said t' give yuh dis," he hastily added, and dropped a note he had also been palming in the talon-like hand. The note was short. It read:

MY DEAR CABOT:

Please cash the accompanying check for thirty thousand and give the money to Dink—the bearer. He's more reliable than you might imagine from my reception of him at the Ritz that night.

BRIAN STRONG.

"Wait a minute."

Barry closed his cash-drawer, slipped out of the cage and heard the door lock behind him, and hurried into young Howson's private office. The branch manager, who was talking to another employee, dismissed the man after a few final words and the latter left the office. In silence Barry laid the check and the open note on the desk before him. Howson read them at a glance and whistled softly.

"That's his signature," he said, "both on the check and in the note."

"I know it is. Then it's all right to cash the check?"

"Sure this messenger is Dink?"

"Yes. He turned up inopportunately at our table the night Strong dined with me. Don't you remember? You saw him, too, and the frozen face he got from Strong. You spoke of it the next morning."

Howson nodded.

"I remember. His picture was in the pretty album they sent to Uncle Alfred from the Gallery. Dink's as unprepossessing a customer as one would find in a long hunt, but that report of Strong said Dink was his henchman." He rose. "I'll come in and have a look at him. It's easy enough to believe Strong needs a lot of cash right now and doesn't dare come for it, himself."

When both young men were in the cage, Howson gave the messenger a casual inspection and nodded.

"All right," he told Barry. "I'll bring in the money." He addressed Dink. "How does Mr. Strong want it?"

"Grands."

When Howson returned, Barry counted out thirty one-thousand-dollar notes and the talon-like hands clutched them. The next instant the Shadow was gone.

"He took a big chance, coming here," Howson mused aloud. "Banks aren't his appropriate background in the daytime. He must have been on the rack while he waited." Howson was still lingering in the cage and he showed no immediate intention of leaving. It was still only five minutes past nine and there was no one

else before the window. "Your friend Strong seems to be in this business up to his necktie," Howson added. "I dined with my uncle last night and he told me something that surprised me."

If he had been about to repeat Uncle Alfred's confidence he thought better of it. Two persons suddenly appeared before the wicket—a young man to make a deposit and a young girl with a twenty-five-dollar check which she desired cashed in "fives, ones, and silver." Howson strolled out of the cage, and in the rush of the next few hours Barry forgot to speculate over Uncle Alfred's revelation.

He dined before returning to his rooms, that night, and reached the haven of his sitting-room a little after eight. The General informed him that his telephone had been ringing ever since six o'clock and Barry received the information with a depressed nod. His program for the evening was two hours of reading and then to bed, but first he must see Janet. He telephoned to her apartment and received no response. The General, summoned from the lower regions, was for once allowed to complete his sentences and made the most of the privilege. He reported that Mrs. and Miss Perry had gone out about two o'clock and had not returned. He added that they both seemed worried. They had called a taxicab and had gone away in it.

Barry was not alarmed. Janet Perry, who could dance ten miles in a night without fatigue, never walked half a block if she could help it. Neither did Mrs. Perry, who had not the exercise of dancing. As to the worry, Janet had been worried for days and her aunt was a

congenital worrier who, having no cares in the world, wore features continually puckered by acute anxiety.

Young Cabot was relieved to have the rest of the evening to himself. He wanted to think things over. There was nothing he felt he had to do immediately—the advice of Colonel Jessup had temporarily relieved his mind on that score—and he tried to convince himself that “headquarters” would continue to leave Janet and him alone. Hennessy, who was no fool, had either decided that the couple had seen nothing or that, if they had, the man they saw was merely poor Dan Skelly in his first agony. There was nothing to be gained by dwelling on that. The real purpose of the detective’s investigation, Barry now realized, had been to discover whether or not they had seen Tony Bosco. Apparently some one at their table or very near it had caught a glimpse of Tony and had given Hennessy the tip. Hennessy might have one or more witnesses ready to testify to Tony’s presence in or near that corridor; a strong card for Hennessy if his witnesses were convincing.

The telephone bell rang sharply and Barry answered it. At the sound of the voice at the other end his body grew tense.

“That you, Cabot?” The voice was Strong’s. He would have known it among thousands. “Can you spare me an hour? It’s important. In fact, I’m holding you up to your promise to do something for me on demand.”

There was no hesitation in the young man’s hearty response.

“Of course, Mr. Strong. Are you coming here?”

"No." The voice, which had been very serious, brightened a trifle. "Don't I wish I could!" it added with something like a laugh. "I'm asking you to take a little run uptown." He named a street and number. "It's business, old man, and time presses. Can you start at once?"

"I'll be with you as soon as a taxicab will get me there."

"Good boy." There was a definite lessening of the tension of the voice at the other end of the wire. "You see," it went on almost lightly, "the boys at headquarters have made up their minds that they want to see more of me. They're hustling me into the Tombs to-night."

"Good Lord!"

"Don't let it worry you. Of course they merely want me as a witness. I may be released on bail right away. But hustle along, please. I've got a few matters to attend to before I take my journey."

"I'm starting!" Barry hung up the receiver and for a long moment stood staring blankly ahead of him. In vain he assured himself that Strong was right in emphasizing the unimportance of his arrest. The young man's nerves, already upset by the episodes of the past fortnight, were jumping. All the possibilities of the situation unrolled before him, as well as others he felt to be impossible. Yet there they were. Very clearly he saw his own position in this debacle. He was in it now, and, like Strong, "up to his necktie."

He felt his face flush. It was no time to think of himself. He saw Strong's side of it. It must now be a case

of every man for himself in Strong's circle. Upon whom save Barry could Brian Strong call? As an undercurrent to the rushing mental river of these reflections, Barry heard Jessup's words, uttered the night he had last dined with the Colonel: The gangsters may toss the police something to satisfy them and the newspapers, and to save the real culprit. . . . It won't be the first time that's been done. . . . Three men that were innocent died in the electric chair. . . ."

Barry's face was pale, but his jaw set. With surprise he heard his own voice breaking the silence of the listening room.

"Nothing like that's going to happen this time," he rasped between clenched teeth. Snatching up his hat and coat, he hurried out.

CHAPTER VII

DINK MAKES A LOAN

BARRY picked up a passing taxicab and ordered the driver to "step on it." The words reminded him of his memorable ride with Tony the Cat. His mood changed and black depression settled over him. He had begun to hope that he might escape that corner of the Skelly net, and here it was twisting around him again. He tried to keep his mind exclusively on Strong's position; indeed, the realization of it was a sickening undercurrent to all his thoughts; but his vision of Strong in a trap had passed. No doubt Strong, wanted merely as a witness, would be out on bail in a few days, as Strong himself had suggested.

It was easy to be optimistic about Strong's position. Strong had always got out of trouble. Strong would get out of this. It was less easy to down the conviction of jeopardy to his own career, and Barry Cabot had enjoyed very little experience in the altruistic pastime of considering others before himself. Though he was ashamed of it, an inner criticism of Strong for drawing him into this situation found birth and persisted. Strong could have found some one else to help him out. . . . Strong was too much a man of the world not to realize exactly what he was letting his young

friend in for. Strong had realized that Cabot, despite his New England training and inheritance of caution, was a hero-worshiper. Strong might be deliberately trading on that knowledge. . . .

Barry's driver was "stepping on it." The fool was taking all sorts of chances. Just now, by the narrowest possible margin, he had missed a cab shooting out of a side street. Well, let him act like the lunatic he was. The thought actually struck Barry that it might save a lot of trouble later on if the driver smashed up, right now, his cab, himself, and his passenger. So deep was that passenger's sense of something far more serious in the general situation than Strong's bare words had suggested. That sense was his excuse for the fact that he was not taking very well this sudden clarion call to action that life was sounding in his ears. He had responded physically, but mentally he was holding back. He wasn't the man he had thought himself. He was merely an inexperienced boy: and in this hour of self-revelation he knew himself to be, temporarily at least, a disgruntled and frightened boy.

With a swerve and a jerk that almost sent him off the seat, the cab stopped before the address he had given the driver and the latter turned and grinned back at his passenger with a display of teeth that cut across his face like a line of white picket palings. The sound of squealing brakes was still in the air.

"'Most passed it," he airily informed Barry, who grinned back wanly as he paid the fare and added the expected generous tip. Something in him responded to this care-free young devil who at least was as skil-

ful as he was reckless. The exchange of grins, the momentary contact of youth with youth, had braced the passenger; but he envied the driver as the latter again "stepped on it" and shot away.

The house Barry approached was one of New York's typical old-fashioned brown-stone structures, with a short flight of steps leading to its double doors. The street was a good one, just off Fifth Avenue, and everything about the building was in excellent condition. It might be a private house or a former private house made over into small apartments. The visitor inclined toward the latter theory when his ring of the bell was answered by a man in quiet livery, who ushered him into a well-furnished hall running rather too much to console-tables and to lamps with large rose-toned shades. The man's expression when he heard Barry's name showed that he knew the caller was expected. "This way, please," he said and immediately led the young man up a staircase on the left of the hall and along a corridor on the second floor to a room at the front of the house. On the door of this room he knocked, pushed it slightly ajar without waiting for an answer, and then departed, leaving the visitor to enter unannounced.

Barry walked into the room. It was a large one, with closed folding-doors at the rear and two unusually wide windows in front overlooking the street. There were four men in it, but Barry's eyes sought and immediately found Brian Strong, who was seated at a flat-top desk near the farther of the wide windows. Behind him, in the shadows of a corner, was an outline

that might have been another shadow. The loyal Dink was obviously on the job. Near the door was a silent waiting figure in plain clothes; a similar figure of familiar outlines stood motionless at the second window, with its hands in its pockets, lost in contemplation of the street below.

Strong rose briskly and came forward with an outstretched hand which Barry grasped with energy. Already, as always in this man's presence, the familiar attraction had asserted itself and he felt his mental attitude changing. The brief resentment he had experienced died in him.

"It's good of you to come, old man," Strong said in his usual buoyant tone. "But I knew you would," he added, with his engaging smile. "Sit down and I'll tell you why I sent out the SOS." He pointed to a chair beside the writing table and, when Barry had taken it, dropped back into his own chair, rested his elbows on the table, and leaned confidentially toward his visitor.

"This is business," he said in a low voice which might or might not have reached the ears of the Shadow and the big man at the window. "When I sent Dink to cash that check, I didn't expect this urgent invitation from the police quite so soon. As I said, I may be out on bail in a day or two. Then again, I may not. These gentlemen from headquarters seem to be collecting human souvenirs of the Skelly affair, and there's no telling how soon they'll be ready to part with us. I'm going on the theory that I may be in the Tombs for some time. Can you tell me the amount of my present balance at your bank?"

"I remember the balance after your check was cashed. Have you cashed any checks or made any deposits since then?"

"No."

Barry reflected an instant, took a pencil and notebook from his pocket, wrote something on a page, tore out the page, and handed it to his host. Strong glanced at the figures and nodded.

"That's about what I thought."

He walked over to the open fire, dropped the bit of paper into the flames, and for a few instants stood watching it burn. Then he returned to the desk and, still standing, began to empty his pockets. They contained a flat gold watch, a small gold pocket pencil, a fountain-pen, a folding check-book, a monogrammed linen handkerchief in its original folds, and a roll of bank-notes. He proceeded to count the money. The large figure at the window, seemingly drawn by this display of affluence, turned and came toward the desk and Barry recognized the imperturbable Hennessy.

"Oh . . . how are you," said Barry, somewhat taken aback.

"Good evenin', Mr. Cabot." The detective spoke casually, but his expression reminded Barry of Hennessy's prediction about the surprises young Cabot was to receive in connection with the Skelly case. Clearly this was one of them and Hennessy was giving him time to get its effect. He turned his attention from the new-comer and fastened his steady eyes on Strong.

Having counted his money and restored the other

articles to his pockets, Strong detached the outer bank-note and offered the roll to Barry.

"Could you take care of this for me?" he asked. "It isn't as large as it was, but it's more than I care to carry about just now."

"Of course."

"No receipt, please, but put it some place where you can get at it in a hurry," Strong added as the young man counted the money; and Barry thrust the roll into his pocket.

"I suppose no one can change this for me," Strong mused, indicating the lonely "grand."

Barry held out his hand.

"I'll change it in the morning and bring the money to you at noon," he promised. Strong passed it over and drawing the handful of loose bank-notes from his trousers pocket, proceeded to count them.

"Only a little over four hundred," he remarked. "Do you happen to have any more on you?"

"Not more than forty or fifty, I'm sorry to say." Barry produced what he had. "I never carry much," he added sedately. All his poise had returned in this familiar atmosphere of money-handling and counting. He was so wholly reassured, that he did not even call his own attention to the reassurance. But a sudden action of the Shadow brought him back to the Skelly case.

"I gotta few century notes, Boss," Dink huskily brought out.

"You'll need them," his master said. "Dink is to be a guest at the Tombs, too," he mentioned in passing.

"What in hell'd I need it for?" Dink vehemently inquired. He was emptying his pockets on his master's desk as he spoke, and the other men followed the little scene with varying degrees of interest. Dink separated the bank-notes he held and shoved them directly in front of Strong, who had dropped back into his chair.

"Four centuries, six sawbucks, t'ree fives, an' six case notes," Dink muttered.

Strong nodded and picked up the four one-hundred-dollar bank-notes.

"I'll take these till to-morrow," he agreed. "You keep the rest. You'll want to send out for dinner and breakfast, and, as I remember the rates in the Tombs neighborhood, eighty-one dollars will just about pay for them."

Dink revealed his yellow teeth and returned the smaller bank-notes to his pocket. His pale eyes showed a sudden gleam. He had got an uplift over that loan, and this, Barry reflected, was why Strong had taken it. He himself had experienced a similar thrill over his little share in financing the cornered gambler. He and this underworld thug had at least one emotion in common. The fact interested him. The Shadow dropped back into a chair, hands between his knees, his pale eyes on Strong's face. Barry found himself harboring the odd suspicion that Dink had a better nature.

"Ready now, Strong?" Hennessy asked briskly.

"Great Scott, no! But I'd be obliged if you and Dixon there would step out into the hall while I have a few words in private with Mr. Cabot. You, too, Dink," he added, and quenched the momentary glow in

the Shadow's colorless eyes. The latter rose, however, though already Hennessy was shaking a regretful head.

"Sorry, but it can't be done. We'll go to the other end of the room, an' that's the best we can do for you. Come along, you." This last admonition was to Dink as Hennessy strolled toward his fellow-officer; and the Shadow drifted in his wake like a fog.

Strong began to speak, at once, in a new voice, urgent and so low that Barry had to bend to catch it.

"I may be in a bad jam," he began. "I hope I needn't tell you that I had nothing whatever to do with Dan Skelly's murder," he stopped to interpolate.

"No, Mr. Strong, you needn't."

The young man's tone brought the other's eyes to his in a deep look.

"That's good of you," Strong said gratefully, "and it makes things easier. However, we've got to face the facts. There's no overestimating the stupidity of the police, and just now New York is yowling for a victim. It's quite possible that I . . ." he hesitated and then finished with a smile his card associates would have recognized but which Barry had never seen before, "that I may be elected It!" he finished.

"Nonsense! That's utterly out of the question!" Barry spoke strongly, but again a slow chill slithered down the length of his spine. Strong did not waste time in argument. That was never his way. He did not argue. He informed.

"You must wonder why I got you into this," he hurried on. "I'll tell you. It's because of the possibility I've mentioned. No other conditions would have made

me do it. I wouldn't have brought you here on banking business in a thousand years. You won't hear from me again, and I don't want you to come near me or communicate with me in any way if things go right.—Hennessy!" He had broken off abruptly, "will you take that thousand from Mr. Cabot and get some small notes for me to-morrow morning?"

"I will that," Hennessy promised good-naturedly, coming back for the bank-note Barry handed over, while Dink the Shadow glowered at the cop like a man wronged.

"Hennessy's a good chap in his way," Strong went on in an undertone, as the detective walked back to his place. "It's a big card for him to have me on the leash, and I've got him to make a few concessions. One is that you and your friends are not to be called as witnesses simply because, as he tells me, you happened to have an unfortunate table at the Cockcrow that night. What's the sense in dragging you into this to prove that poor Dan Skelly was shot!"

"That was mighty thoughtful of you," Barry said quickly.

"You and the lady you were with can't afford to be mixed up with the likes of us," Strong serenely assured him. "Don't come near me," he repeated with sudden emphasis, "unless I send for you. I won't do that unless I'm going up the river. Then I'll need you. But when I want my cash back, I'll send a man with an order for it."

"In any case, I'll do anything in the world I can."

"Good boy! I oughtn't to let you, but I may have to

if the cards run the wrong way. God! perhaps it was a bad day for you when we went fishing!" He drew a quick breath, his first sign of deep feeling. "Now we understand each other," he went on calmly. "Emergency work only, and as a last resort."

"Mr. Strong—" the words rushed to the speaker's lips and he could not check them—"do you know who committed that murder?"

Strong met his eyes.

"I think I do."

"And you're willing to die for him rather than tell who he is! I can't understand that code," Barry muttered through his teeth.

"Willing? Hell, no! Die for that skunk? Of course I don't want to. I'll give the district attorney the prettiest fight he's ever had, before he convicts me. We'll have a trial that'll make the country sit up. But my friends aren't the skunk's friends, and his friends aren't mine. They'll do things for him that mine can't do. They'll do anything to save him, and unfortunately Mantell, who's the only square man in the bunch except Skelly himself, and the only other man that would have stood by me, was in the wash-room when the gun-play came off. You see where that leaves me!"

Barry saw, and for the third time felt the chill creep down his spine. Strong straightened in his chair, with an entire change of manner.

"That's what I wanted to say," he ended. "It's life or death with me. If I'm indicted, and there's very little doubt that I shall be, you're absolutely out of it unless I'm convicted. I don't want any misunderstanding about

that. You'll only worry me if you interfere. If I'm convicted, I'll want a talk with you. Will you come?"

"Anywhere. Any time." It was all Barry could say.

"There are certain things the skunk and his friends will have to do if I'm bumped off," Strong went on; "certain obligations they've got to meet to others that I'm responsible for. If they can get out of it, they will, the lying, framing, white-livered crew," he said between his teeth. "I'll leave some thumb-screws behind me to bring them to time."

He rose. "That's all, my boy. I hope we shan't meet again. I had a little personal scheme, harmless enough, in connection with you. But it's off now. This is good-by, unless New York's big thumb goes down."

He got up and grasped the young man's hand. The future Napoleon of finance returned the grip and then stood before him speechless and with an aching throat, as the little boy of fourteen years ago had done when they parted at the old gate in Wheaton. In this moment Barry recalled that parting and the look of the storm-swept sky. Strong released his hand and spoke cheerfully.

"All right, Hennessy, I'm ready. Thanks for your patience. Better toddle along, Cabot," he added, as Barry lingered. But the boy—he was still a boy again in this moment—remained motionless, looking at him.

"Any time. Anything," he brought out again in a choked voice. He stumbled from the room and hurried downstairs, out of the house, and toward Fifth Avenue. His association with the underworld, brief though it had been, was teaching him much; or perhaps it was

merely bringing to the surface things he had heard or read. A closed automobile with a watchful-eyed man at the wheel was standing at the curb a few doors away. Barry told himself the one thing he could not endure was the sight of that little group entering that automobile. He strode along as if pursued by furies, as indeed he was; and, feeling the need of privacy, he stopped a passing cab on the avenue, gave the driver his home address, and sank wretchedly into a corner of the shelter he had sought.

What next? The answer seemed as inevitable as the question. Janet was next. He must see her. The episode at Strong's uptown flat had not taken more than thirty minutes. It was still early. Janet would not have gone to bed. He must see Janet.

At the reflection a change came over his spirit. It was not peace, though it might have been; now that he knew she at least was past the danger of the witness-chair. It was not comfort, it was certainly not a thrill. It was merely a deep and unquestioning acceptance at last of her place in his life. Disapprove of her as he had done, as perhaps he must still do, she was there and she was there to stay. He did not try to understand the fact; he merely accepted it. She was there. He knew it now. She must always be there. To succeed in her resolution to begin a new life she must have his help. If she did not succeed, more than ever she would need his help. But his thoughts did not dwell on that possibility. He had faith in her and in himself. Somehow, some way, they would work out their future.

Odd that he should be thinking of her now and not

of Strong on his way to the Tombs. Yet, after all, that was understandable enough. He dared not think of Strong, or of that strange bond between them, forged by Strong in a few idle hours and by himself throughout all the rest of the years he had lived. He dared not think of that bond ; because in his deepest subconsciousness he already knew that eventually it would lead him into court, into the witness-chair, and into a new and uncharted life.

CHAPTER VIII

WHAT UNCLE ALFRED KNEW

AFTER that, it seemed natural to find Janet at home and alone, Mrs. Perry having already made the exodus to her own room. Janet led the way to the fireplace and their favorite arm-chairs.

"I was sure you'd come," she said as they sat down. "I don't know why, but I expected you."

"I have news for you."

Barry settled back in his chair, took a cigarette from the box she indicated on the stand between them, and lighted it while her magnetism enveloped him like a slowly rising tide. He was finding in her actual presence the comfort the thought of Janet could never bring. She was all Janet of Wheaton to-night—quiet, sympathetic, understanding, subdued, very much as she had been on that memorable night after Marcia Cabot's funeral.

"News?" she sighed. "I suppose it isn't good news, by any chance. That doesn't seem possible."

"It is, though. I've just learned that you're not to be troubled any more over the Skelly matter. You won't be called as a witness. Neither will any of the gang—though I dare say that may be a disappointment to them."

Janet drew a quick breath.

"That is good news." She added, with a curious glance at him: "You don't seem much relieved by it. Think of what it means to you. Yet you look all in."

"I'm relieved, of course. But I'm a bit done up, too. I'm one of the tired business men you read about."

He was wondering if he ought to tell her of his tragic interview with Strong. He decided against it, for no reason except a reluctance to reopen the memory of that haunting episode. He wanted to continue at peace, alone with Janet, with the world and its problems shut out.

"This is good," he sighed.

She seemed to understand his mood, and for a long time they remained silent, though now his eyes were oftener on her than on the fire. She, too, was plainly tired, but she was unusually lovely. The hard look she had worn of late had left her face, perhaps because the face was without its usual vivid make-up. He liked the gown she wore—a lovely thing of green and silver that suited her copper-toned hair and the lights in her brown eyes. With an increasing sense of relaxation he clasped his hands at the back of his smooth black head and sank deeper into his big chair.

"I've been doing a lot of thinking lately, Barry," Janet said at last. "It's getting to be a habit, and perhaps I've strained my mind. Probably that's why I'm so stupid to-night."

"You're never stupid; and just now you're wonderfully restful."

She turned a lighted face to him.

"That's one of the nicest things you could say to me. Have you had a hard day?" she went on as he remained silent.

"Yes, very."

She gave him another chance to talk, but he did not take it, and at last she spoke again:

"Will it bore you if I tell you what I've been thinking about? Would you rather I kept quiet and let you rest?"

He would have preferred just that, but he said the right thing:

"Of course not. Tell me anything you like. You know I'm interested."

"I'm never sure you are," she said unexpectedly. "I've never been sure since I used to trail around after you when I was six. You meant everything to me, even then. You always did. But I got used to being patient and having you take me on when none of the boys showed up."

"I was a selfish little whelp," he murmured.

"You were, and of course I spoiled you. So did your aunt. You have never had to think of any one but yourself, Barry, so you've never learned how."

"I'm afraid that's true." He pondered the charge for a moment and then added with a twisted smile: "But don't worry about it. I have an idea that I'm in for a postgraduate course of experience along those very lines."

"What do you mean by that?" She was looking at him with quickened interest but self-consciously. He saw that she had misunderstood him.

"I don't want you to have me on your mind as a burden, ever," she offered.

"I wasn't thinking of you when I spoke, though you are on my mind and I know now that you always will be. I was thinking of some one else."

"A girl?"

"Heavens, no! A man."

She dismissed the man with a gesture, and again her tired face took on that illumined look.

"What made you say you will always have me on your mind?" she asked in a low voice.

"Because I've just learned that I shall." He smiled at her. "I suppose I've fallen in love with you, Jan. I seem to have all the symptoms."

"Don't be silly!" The blood rushed to the roots of her copper-colored hair. He looked at her in surprise. Then he lowered his arms and drew his chair closer to hers. "I believe you've known it all the time," he said sternly.

"I don't know it now, and neither do you. I wish you wouldn't choose this particular night, when I seem to have the weight of the world on me, to joke about serious things."

"You bet they're serious things," he admitted. She waited, but he was leaning back in his chair again with the air of a man who had said all he meant to say. She could have shaken him.

"You don't approve of a thing about me," she remarked abruptly. He sighed and came back to her from the room up in Sixty-seventh Street.

"I approve passionately of four things," he told her.

"Your loyalty, your looks, your magnetism, and a sporting spirit you've always had. I think the sporting spirit is going to pull you above the other things that . . ."

"That you simply can't endure in me," she finished for him as he hesitated.

"That I don't like as much as the things I've mentioned," he substituted.

"If this is a love-scene," she said slowly, looking into the fire, "it's a queer one."

"It's an infernally queer one," he admitted.

"Could you really care for any one you disapprove of as utterly as you do of me?"

He sighed.

"I don't disapprove of you now, though you're spoiling the evening. And it was so restful."

She gave him an odd look.

"That's all this means to him," she told the whispering fire. "A little relaxation after a hard day. I thought so."

In the wakeful hours of many succeeding nights Barry Cabot thought of a dozen answers he might have made to that comment—varying answers but all of them substantial proofs of his sincerity, to a girl whose self-respect was trailing its wings in the dust. At the moment, incredibly, he made none of them. There were various reasons for this. He was tired to the soul. He was horribly depressed. The inner caution that was so basic a part of him was reasserting itself. He had already said much more than he had meant to say so soon. It was no time now for this unwisdom. His

singing nerves were quieting, but his thoughts were still in chaos. He was not up to discussion, not up to argument and vows and protestations. What he needed was to sit at peace until the inner turmoil that was the inevitable aftermath of his day should subside.

His mind was at ease about Janet. She was not to be drawn into the Skelly case, and in the end the Skelly case might prove the turning-point of her new life. It had opened her eyes. It had sent her scurrying back into the personality of Janet of Wheaton. Looking at her as she sat there, so young, so lovely, so poised, it seemed incredible to him that he had ever heard her clear diction thicken, had ever seen that film over her brilliant eyes. The mere memory of these things gave him an inner chill. Enough had been said for to-night. He had told her he loved her, and the rest could wait. Janet would be there when the right time came for a complete understanding. Janet had always been there.

His decision was hardly a conscious one. He had already forgotten her question, and he had hardly heard her last murmured comment. His mental processes were almost subconscious, but they registered. He sat silent, gazing at the fire, and to the girl beside him the torch that for a few blessed moments he had held up in her dark path vanished. She spoke abruptly:

"Barry, I haven't talked much to you about my father, since we were children, have I?"

He welcomed the change of subject. If she must talk, and apparently she must, by all means let her talk of something as remote as that engineer in South America.

"Not since we were youngsters," he confirmed. "We used to talk a lot about him at Wheaton; and don't you remember our games with him and J. C. Bleecker as our heroes? Both those men were mighty romantic figures to us."

"Then." Her bitter emphasis on the word made him turn to look at her.

"Have you heard anything new about your father? Is he coming up here?"

"No, he's not coming here. He's never coming here. At least he never even hints at coming, and now I'm sure he never will. I used to picture him toiling day and night to give me all the luxuries I have, and living his wild life without any comforts, himself. It made me awfully unhappy. I've longed for him all my life. I'd rather have had him, penniless, than be alone with all he could send me. But since I came to New York my notions of him have changed. I believe he's supremely selfish. The money he gives me is simply a sop to his conscience, if he has one, and I'm sure he can give it without sacrifice. The friend who acts for him here told me, when I was old enough to understand, that my father had a large income and that I could have anything I wanted, in reason. I suspect now that Father has married again in South America, or that at least he has his own establishment there and perhaps a new set of children. There must be something to account for his utter indifference to me."

Barry's sex loyalty felt called upon to defend the absent man.

"I don't see how you can think he's indifferent," he

broke in. "He has certainly provided for you mighty well."

"That's something," she admitted, "but that's all. Mr. Haven, the friend who acts for him, sent for me to-day and gave me a letter that was part of a budget of mail Father sent up to the New York representative of his firm."

"What is his firm?"

"It's a Brazilian mining and construction company, but it sends Father all over the continent. The few letters he writes me come from all sorts of places. Mr. Haven is the head of the New York office."

"What sort of man is he?"

"Very nice. I used to wish I'd had the luck to have a father like him, but now I'm not so sure."

"Why not?" Barry was interested.

"Oh, I don't know. It's just a feeling that's developed in these last years. I've never tried to think out the explanation of it, but . . ." She was evidently trying to do so now. "Perhaps one reason is that he's so terribly cautious in what he says about Father. He doesn't speak of him as if Father were a man he liked and admired. He becomes absolutely businesslike when I ask questions, and he cuts down his answers to the bone, though when we're on any other subject he's very chatty and I've always loved to hear him talk. I don't see him often, not more than a few times a year unless I go to his office in some emergency, but we've known each other so long that we're awfully good friends. I'm perfectly sure now that he doesn't approve of Father; and it's his manner when I bring up the

subject that made me think there might be an irregular establishment. Still, if there is, I don't see why he should mind it," she added with the large tolerance born of her recent associations. "Men don't mind such things, do they?"

She waited a moment, and seeing that Barry was evidently cranking up his mind, gave it some additional work to do: "I thought possibly there might be something wrong with the firm, too. But Mr. Haven would hardly be critical of that, would he, since he's in it himself?"

"If he's merely the head of the New York office, a salaried man without an interest in the company, he might be intensely critical of everything about the firm," Barry grinned. "By the way, you have some of the letter-heads, haven't you?"

"Yes. Father always writes on them."

"If you'll give me one, I'll look up the firm's standing," he briskly suggested.

She hesitated.

"Would that be the right thing to do?"

"Why not? The business standing of any firm is a legitimate subject of inquiry, and this is a matter between you and me. Naturally, I wouldn't prattle about anything I found out."

She became a battle-field of doubts.

"I'm not sure I ought to. No suspicion of the firm ever entered my mind till lately, and I can't see that it's my business to nose into Father's financial affairs. It doesn't seem quite . . . what's the word I want?"

"Filial?"

"Yes, filial. You see what I mean?"

"Of course."

"And if we found that anything was wrong, it would be horrible. It would add a turn of the screw to what I'm going through. Naturally, too, I'd feel that I couldn't use any more of the money he sends me."

"Then you'd better let the matter rest," Barry hastily agreed. "So far, there doesn't seem to be any reason for suspecting that something's wrong with the firm. As to Haven's feeling against your father, that's only too common among men associated in big companies—or small ones, for that matter. They're not all birds agreeing in their little nests, you know. The internal warfare that goes on in business offices is appalling, and it destroys a big percentage of the efficiency of the men. I've been making quite a study of that sort of thing, on the side, of course, and—"

He was on one of his hobbies, but she ruthlessly dragged him off its back.

"I've thought of that," she eagerly agreed. "I mean of it's being merely a personal feeling between Mr. Haven and Father. And though I've always spoken of Mr. Haven as Father's friend, I realize now that I had no special reason for doing it. It was just an idea that began in childhood. Because he represented my father I assumed that they must be friends. It wasn't till I grew up and came here that I began to notice how reserved he always was when the subject of Father came up. I saw then that he agreed with me perfectly that Father was neglecting me, and he admitted it again to-day when Aunt Anne and I were in his office. He

said I was entirely justified in resenting it. It was the first time I had let myself out on the subject, and when I began I couldn't stop. All I'd been thinking for years poured out. I said a lot of things, and he didn't make the slightest effort to defend Father except to remind me that a man's particular job in life, whatever it was, has to come before anything else, even before his family."

"You say you saw him to-day?"

"Yes. He sent for me and gave me my allowance. Father explained in his letter that he was just starting a big job that would keep him in the interior a while. It was just one of his usual matter-of-fact notes. He simply wants me off his mind. I asked Mr. Haven what the new job was and he said it was a bridge."

Barry got up to go.

"He's evidently a fine engineer, and you may be all wrong about the other matter."

"Just the same," Janet rose also and went with him to the door, "the other matter was what made me so anxious to work at my singing. I want to be able to earn my own living. I want to write to my father that he needn't have me on his mind any more. I'm buckling right down to work. I've cut everything else out and it's going to stay out. Will you remember that?" she ended with a meaning. "My wild oats have been sown. Once and for all, my fling is over."

"Good girl!" he said again, and looked down at her with shining eyes. "By Jove, Jan, you don't know how happy it makes me to have you say that!"

"I don't deserve any credit. It's easy," she sighed.

"I don't want that sort of life any more. The first thought of it brings back the picture of poor Dan Skelly, and of the other . . . the Cat . . ." She shivered.

"Of course you don't want any more of it. I knew you'd sicken of it soon, in any case. This has merely hastened your cure."

Her bobbed head, with its shining cap of copper-colored hair, came just to his heart. She looked up at him and he saw tears in her eyes. An impulse seized him to take her in his arms, to kiss away those tears. He moved closer to her, but she had ceased to look at him. Instead she opened the door and held it wide for him to pass out. In his moment of indecision the General's bedizened form appeared at the head of the staircase and that august personage now proceeded to carry out the house rules of lowering the hall lights at midnight. Barry stepped across the threshold.

"Good night," he said quietly. "I'll see you tomorrow."

For a moment before the door swung to he held her eyes. Her tears had dried, but the expression of those eyes made him stop short.

"Jan!" he began impetuously.

"Good night," she said, closing the door between them. He went on to his rooms, puzzled and depressed.

He did not sleep well that night, but he had not expected to. Toward dawn he dropped off into a disturbed slumber with an undercurrent of strenuous dreaming in which Janet Perry and Brian Strong, helpless on a broken bridge, were being swept down a madly

rushing tropical river while he himself shouted useless warnings from a bank. He awoke heavy of heart and eye and made his usual seven-stride journey from the day-bed to the door.

He was not cheered by the contents of his newspapers. It was "rumored" that Brian Strong would be held in the Tombs without bail, not as a material witness but as the suspected murderer of Dan Skelly. It was mentioned in three newspapers that Barry Cabot had visited the gambler just after his arrest. Two of the journals, thanks to the ponderous but real consideration of Hennessy, explained that the young man's call was a business one, its purpose being to supply Strong with some needed cash from Cabot's bank, in which the gambler was a depositor. But the third was not so discreet. Its news story ended with a plain hint that the young assistant teller of the big bank had been seen in public with Strong and might know something about the Skelly case.

Barry expected a call to Howson's office as a result of this. The branch manager would wish to see him, if only to satisfy his own curiosity. But a much more impressive summons came to him during the morning. Young Howson delivered it in person.

"Say, old man," he announced, coming into Barry's cage a little after ten o'clock and wasting one of Uncle Alfred's best expressions on his assistant's unseeing back, "the president wants to see you."

Barry groaned.

"I thought he would. Though I hoped he might turn the job over to you again."

"No such luck." Howson's expression grew slightly less austere. "I'll send Dodge in to relieve you. Step lively, though. Uncle Alfred is the least patient man I know."

Barry stepped lively, which meant that five minutes later he was wafted in an elevator to that sumptuous suite of offices on the second floor of the building which the distinguished president of the great chain of banks had made his headquarters. The young man was admitted to the presence almost at once, and was received with an expression of combined power and affability which he grimly told himself young Howson could never hope to emulate. It relieved him, but it also surprised him, and the president's first words added to his confusion.

"Sit down, Cabot," his great superior began, motioning to a chair near his desk. "I see you're in the morning news," he casually ended.

"Yes, sir," Barry flushed. "I'm very sorry," he went on. "I know it must be annoying to you, in that connection."

"It's not exactly the advertising we want," the president agreed, with a rather pinched smile. Alfred E. Howson, still in the mid-afternoon of life, was the professionally amiable type of executive whose amiability deserted him frequently and with extreme abruptness. He had been a good fellow and a sportsman in his youth, but his character had deteriorated under the corroding effects of too many board meetings. Barry was not sure how long this present calm would last. He smiled disarmingly.

"Mr. Strong wanted to know his exact balance in the bank," he mentioned.

"He could have got that information in two minutes by telephoning for it."

"I gathered that he wanted it given confidentially. When he asked for it, I wrote it on a slip of paper, and I noticed that he dropped the slip into the fire as soon as he had looked at it."

"What else did he want?"

"He wanted me to take charge of his roll. His man, Dink the Shadow, cashed a check for thirty thousand dollars at our bank a few days ago. Mr. Strong gave me ten thousand dollars to keep till he needed it. I suppose he didn't want to carry too much cash to the Tombs."

"What else?"

There was a slight edge on the president's agreeable voice and his expression was one which was becoming familiar to Barry as assumed by the younger Howson in moments of stress.

"He borrowed some money from me," Barry smiled. "Fifty dollars."

"*What!*" For once the great banker was merely an amazed human being.

"Yes, sir, fifty dollars. It was all I happened to have in my pockets." The assistant teller was beginning to enjoy himself. "He wanted small bills. He asked if any of us—Dink, two policemen, or I—could change a thousand-dollar bank-note, and of course we couldn't. Evidently a thousand was all Strong was keeping, for the moment. Dink lent him what he had, which was

several hundred, and one of the officers promised to get change for the thousand this morning."

"That's that." The president's interest in the episode seemed exhausted, for he spoke dryly. "And now, Cabot," he added in a level tone, "perhaps you will be good enough to tell me why Brian Strong really sent for you."

As Barry hesitated he added:

"Of course these requests you've mentioned were merely covers for his real purpose. Why did he want you?" His benignity returned as suddenly as it had departed, and he smiled into the young man's troubled eyes.

"My boy," he said kindly, "I didn't bring you up here this morning because of what I had read in the newspapers. I'd have let Ward handle that, of course. It's in his department. I meant to send for you in any case, because of a long talk I had about you last night with my old friend Nicholas Jessup. We dined together at the club. Now that you're here, I'm asking you frankly whether Strong is using that youthful hero-worship of yours, and your decent human sense of obligation to him, to pull you down with him."

"You think he's really down, sir?"

Barry asked the question to gain time, but his heart-beats quickened as he waited for the answer.

"He's down and he's going to stay down, and the pack will tear him to pieces. They've got to, to save their own skins. I told Ward all this, some time ago, and expected him to pass it on to you as an additional reason for you to keep clear of Strong. Strong will

make a good fight, of course, but he hasn't a chance."

"And the Colonel told you . . ."

There was understanding in Uncle Alfred, for he turned his eyes from the young man's face. Also he replied deliberately and at length to a question he fully realized was asked to give the speaker time to think. The banker put the tips of his admirably cared for fingers together and complacently regarded them.

"I think," he said, "that Colonel Jessup repeated to me most of what you told him. As I've said, he and I are old friends and he knew your confidence would be as safe with me as with him. Moreover, he wanted my judgment as to your position in this matter, and my support in any future difficulties that may come up. I promised him both, subject, of course, to the effect any publicity concerning you might have on the bank."

He did not add, and Barry did not suspect, that Nicholas Jessup had won this concession by confessing to the president his own intentions concerning the promising youngster they were discussing.

"He doesn't suspect it," Jessup had said, "but I've left him most of what I have, partly because I'm fond of him but principally, I suppose, because I've no one else to leave it to. He's a fine lad and he ought to be a big figure in New York some day. I shall not change my will unless he gets into some scandal or matrimonial noose that will do for him; but there's no question that he's in a jam just now, and I'm afraid he'll need all the help we can give him to pull him out of it. He's a headstrong young devil."

Howson had agreed affably. His interest in an up-

and-coming young assistant teller with a few hundred thousand of his own had not been vital, even though Barry had made an unusually good record in his first two years at banking. But if the up-and-coming assistant was to inherit most of the Jessup millions, that was something else again, and Howson's interest expanded like an opening flower. Of course the young ass must be kept from entanglements that would imperil a brilliant future.

"It would be a great pity," he told Barry, "if, after the fine start you've made, you let some quixotic impulse undo all you have accomplished. Your name came up at a board meeting a few weeks ago; and I don't suppose it will be any surprise to you to hear that you're right in line for Palmer's place when we push him up—as we expect to do, the first of the year. It would be unfortunate if you should gain any more undesirable advertising between now and then."

Barry decided to make a clean breast of it. There was, indeed, nothing else that he could do. It was clear that the two old cronies had put their heads together and were trying to help him.

"You're very good to me, Mr. Howson, and I appreciate your kindness and my obligations to the bank. I'd been hoping that I could keep clear of any outside complications," he added with an unconscious sigh, "but what you have just told me about Mr. Strong is depressing. I'll tell you exactly what he said."

He repeated Strong's confidence in so far as it affected himself, and Howson listened with an expression of deepening gravity.

"You see how it is," the young man ended. "If he's all right, I can keep out of the way. But if he's down—"

"If he's down . . . and he is . . . it will do him no good to drag you down, too. I don't see what the fellow is thinking of!"

Howson spoke with the irritation of a strong man whose personal wishes and plans are being jeopardized. Then his expression brightened. Again his gaze settled on his finger-tips. Those admirably cared for fingers of his controlled many wires. In one way or another he could get the message to Strong that young Cabot was not to be interfered with. In the meantime he had promised Jessup to attend to another little matter. He turned toward his employee the effulgence of his best board-meeting smile.

"However, his promise gives you a long interval," he continued with obvious relief. "He can't call for you unless he's convicted, and he won't be convicted for months. Let's forget him for the time being. Mrs. Howson and I are having a few young people to dinner to-night, friends of my daughter's. My nephew Ward will be there and we shall be glad if you can join us."

"Thank you, I shall be delighted." Barry reflected that the invitation would keep him away from Janet that night. It was a pity. He had meant to take her out to dinner and to try to learn what lay behind the strange look she had given him when they parted. But of course she would understand that a dinner invitation from a bank president to a youthful employee was like the command of royalty.

"Very good," said Alfred E. Howson. "Eight o'clock, then. Good morning."

Barry felt himself borne from the room on a receding wave of the president's friendly interest.

CHAPTER IX

THE ENGAGING NANCY

BARRY knew that Colonel Jessup had been the god in the machine of this invitation, so he was not surprised when at dinner that night he found himself seated beside the engaging Nancy Howson. He had met her for a moment in the drawing-room just before dinner and she had at once informed him, apparently with pleasure, that he was to take her in.

She was a nice girl—not a beauty but fresh and young and wholesome. She had a contagious laugh and a vivacious manner. She enjoyed life and assumed that every one else did. Over the oysters she assured Barry that he looked like Jack Buchanan. He was getting rather weary of that tribute and a little uncertain of its value. He airily assured Miss Howson that when he looked at her he saw no resemblance to any one else, for there was no other girl like her. The entente between them deepened under the approving eyes of Alfred E., who wore the look of a man who had kept a promise to a friend. In fancy Barry saw the two old pals plotting together.

“Ask him to your home, Howson. Let him meet your girl. He won’t know how nice a girl can be till he sees Nancy.”

Thus the Colonel. Barry could almost hear him say it. And those four venerable hands, such powerful hands in New York, were pushing him and Nancy together. . . . Barry smiled into Nancy's eyes, but between them and his own he saw the eyes of Janet, with that odd look in them, and the face of Brian Strong. No not the face of Strong—the face of J. C. Bleecker. To-night his hero was again J. C. Bleecker.

To him the evening was a disturbed dream. He didn't want to be among all these people. He wanted to be with the only person who could divert his thoughts from Strong. But he played the rôle he knew had been assigned to him. There was dancing after dinner and he coolly demanded three dances with Nancy, regardless of the pathetic protests of other young men pressing around her. One of these was Ward Howson, and, while the branch manager was cordial enough to his friend and assistant, Barry had a strong suspicion that Ward was not delighted to see him there. That was the least of Barry's cares.

He danced the first dance with Nancy and was momentarily irritated by the surprise with which she spoke of his skill. Like Janet, she had evidently expected him to be awkward and inexperienced on the floor. The fact annoyed him, though Nancy put it very nicely.

"I thought you were too busy and too much of a highbrow to go in for this sort of thing," she said.

She herself was an enchanting dancer and he liked her and soon felt amazingly well acquainted with her. To be with her in other conditions would have been

like taking a bracing walk along the seashore. The other girls at the party were attractive, too, and he dutifully danced every dance. But all the time he saw those eyes of Janet's . . . and that last odd look . . . and thought of J. C. Bleeker. . . .

Reaching home a little after twelve o'clock, he wondered if it would be possible to see Janet that night and tentatively put the question to the General.

"I wonder if Miss Perry is in and whether she's up," he observed. "If she is, I'd like to see her for a moment. You might telephone to her rooms—"

He became aware that the General was gazing at him with the bulging eyes of one with tidings.

"Why, didn't you know, sir?" The General's voice dripped surprise and importance. He would be listened to and allowed to complete his sentences. "The ladies—Miss Perry and her aunt—moved out to-day. I thought of course they'd of told you."

"Moved!" Barry stared at him, refusing to take in the word. "Moved!" he repeated more flatly. "When? Where?"

"This afternoon, sir, right after lunch. I don't know where. They didn't say. It was very sudden-like. You see, they rented furnished, so all they had to take was their trunks and Miss Perry's big piano. It wasn't my business to ask for addresses."

Something in the look of the young man must have touched him, for his voice softened. None knew better than the General what good friends these two young things had been and how many pleasant outings they had enjoyed together. For months he had watched

them come and go, and a fine couple he had thought them, though the lady was a bit gay.

"Don't you worry, Mr. Cabot," he said coaxingly. "Of course the young lady has left you a note. Perhaps you'll find it pushed under your door if—"

That was the end of the General's verbal orgy. Barry was leaping up the staircase. Naturally there would be a note from Janet, and some explanation of this amazing departure. There might have been a note almost under his eyes when he came home to dress for dinner. He had been late and had hurried, and had not glanced about or opened his day's mail.

There was no note on the floor. There was no note from Janet anywhere else, as he discovered when he entered the room, flashed on his lights, and nervously ran through the letters that lay on his desk. There was no note. But there was that recurrent memory of the look in Jan's eyes; and now at last he felt that he understood it.

It was not until he turned from the desk that he saw a vague figure emerging from behind a swaying curtain.

"Dink!" he cried out in amazement, adding almost roughly, "How the devil did you get in here?"

Dink showed his yellow teeth in the grimace he evidently considered a smile. He was dressed with his usual neatness, but this time in a dark-blue serge suit with a thick sweater under the coat, a blue cap, and shoes so highly polished that they could have reflected his host's startled face.

He ignored Barry's question, which evidently seemed to him a childish one.

"Boss wants his kale," he muttered, holding out a note. Still standing under one of the side lights in his room, Barry read the note at a glance. It ran:

DEAR CABOT:

Please give Dink, who will call on you unostentatiously, the roll I handed you last night. I find I'll need it sooner than I expected. This is almost my swan-song, old man. You won't be disturbed again for a long time. Good fishing!

B. S.

"How do you happen to be out of jail?" Barry regarded the ambassador disapprovingly.

"Boss had me bailed. He needs me outside."

Dink, who was not a communicative person, did not repeat the heartfelt tribute to himself which he had overheard in court when one newspaper man had expressed surprise to another at the Shadow's unexpected release.

"Hell!" said that well-informed gentleman of the press. "What good is Dink as a witness? In the first place, he was a mile from Skelly's room when the shooting came off, and the police know it. In the second place, he'll simply parrot anything Strong tells him to say, and they know that, too. It's damned unlucky for Strong that the police do know Dink wasn't in Skelly's room during the murder. If he had been there, he'd have said he did it, and that might have saved Strong,

though of course they'd have looked on Dink as Strong's tool."

Barry went to his wall safe and returning with Strong's wad, put it into the fingers stretched forth to clutch it. He desired to get rid of this creature and to let fresh air flood his rooms, but he remembered the look on the Shadow's face when Strong had accepted his money. Here at least was a man who would die for his friend.

"Have a drink?" he heard himself ask as the Shadow secreted the roll of bank-notes inside his sweater.

"Sure." Dink was beside him before Barry could raise the decanter.

"Say when," the host absently suggested. But Dink said nothing at all, merely making a gesture of strong protest when his host took up a soda syphon with the obvious purpose of weakening his drink. Barry replaced the syphon and Dink took his straight whisky in one long gulp and set down the empty glass. The next instant there was nothing but the swaying silk curtain over the nearest window to suggest his visit.

Barry strode to his second-story window, which was open, and looked down. There was a narrow stone ledge just below him, running to a water-pipe and to a first-floor extension of the next house. On the roof of this extension a shadow flickered for a second and was gone. Dink's host had not known what he was told later—that Dink's amazing swiftness and noiselessness of movement were far-famed, and unequaled even in the circles in which he moved. Any good athlete might have accomplished the little stunt Cabot had just

witnessed. Few could have done it with such ease and celerity. For a few seconds Barry stared down on the vacant roof. Then he closed the window and absently began his methodical preparations for bed.

Taking his worries to the bank the next morning, as had become his recent unpleasant habit, Barry found himself longing for a sympathetic ear and understanding heart. He also felt the need of wise counsel, and that, like many of his new experiences, was disturbing. Up till now he had solved his problems without conscious effort, but they had been simple problems and well within his sphere. These questions that reared themselves in his mind and rattled for his attention needed talking over—of course with the right person.

In connection with his worry over Janet, the right person at once came to mind. Queenie Morris had taken it upon herself to advise him, ten days ago, and he was now struggling in the quicksands to which her advice had led him. The least she could do was to point the way out, if, as he began to doubt, any such way existed. Yes, he would call up Queenie, make an appointment with her for supper at Jake's, and learn what she knew, if anything, about Janet's departure and ask what she would advise. A subconscious hint that another visit to a supper club just at present was not exactly discreet was coldly ignored by his conscious mind. He couldn't expect the girl to come to him a second time.

The other oracle he needed did not come to mind so readily, but at last he thought of Ned Wheeler, Crim-

inal Courts reporter, son of a distinguished editor and, according to Ward Howson, an authority on underworld affairs. He decided to ask Wheeler to lunch with him at the Harvard Club that day, and after repeated efforts he succeeded in bringing the busy newspaper man to the telephone.

The next few moments were chastening to Barry. Wheeler did not remember him at first, and when he did was plainly at a loss to understand Cabot's belated yearning for his society. Barry mentioned Ward Howson's name and added that he himself would like to consult Wheeler on a matter wholly out of his own line and very much in Wheeler's. Wheeler finally agreed to meet him for luncheon, but he was plainly bored by the prospect and this annoyed his host. Both warmed perceptibly in the first few moments of their reunion, however, and at the end of fifteen minutes Barry found that he could talk to Wheeler with freedom and confidence. He had meant to draw out what information he needed without giving much in return, but he abandoned that purpose almost as soon as they met. Wheeler—frank, cordial, with the grin of a friendly bulldog and something of the tenacity of one in his make-up—was the type of man who demands cards on the table. Barry put them there and Wheeler took in the exhibit with growing interest.

"Do you think Strong is to be framed?" Barry asked when he had finished his story, again omitting only mention of Tony the Cat.

"I guess there's no doubt of it." Wheeler added without bias, "He may be guilty, at that."

"Impossible. He's not the kind of man that murders."

"Almost any man is the kind that murders, given the conditions that set him off," Wheeler pointed out. "And they think they've got a case against Strong."

"What is it? They can't even prove that Strong was with Skelly that night."

"Oh yes they can. They've got four witnesses now who will admit that they were in the room at the time of the shooting—Big Jim Bosco, Ed Wallis, Jack-knife Casey, and the Featherbed—and they'll all swear that Strong was there, too. Want the dope? Well, as I understand it, this is about their story."

Wheeler checked off the important points on his fingers as he went on.

"Every gambler has streaks of bad luck. Skelly was going through one of these. It was a bad one and it got his goat. He had been losing steadily for months, losing enormous sums. He owed the two Boscos more than a hundred thousand, and welched on paying them. He said the Boscos had cheated him. The Boscos said he made that charge simply because he hadn't the money to pay. The Boscos said Skelly also owed Strong and Mantell sixty or seventy thousand each in gambling debts. Strong and Mantell admit that, but they say they were not concerned about the money and were giving Skelly all the time he needed, knowing he'd pay sooner or later. Feeling between Skelly and the Boscos ran mighty high. The Boscos kept bothering Skelly and every time the three men met there was a row. All clear so far?"

"Yes."

"Then here's the rest. I'm giving you the underworld dope. Skelly persuaded Strong and Mantell to sit in a game with him and the Boscós. His idea was that if they did, they'd catch on to the Boscós' tricks. Strong and Mantell's idea was that Skelly was a bit off his head because of his losses—he'd got so he couldn't sleep—and that they could help straighten things out. They didn't think the Boscós would try any funny business with them in the game, even if they were crooked, as Skelly said they were. The six—the two Boscós, Skelly, Mantell, Wallis, and Strong—played pretty steadily that night from eleven till three o'clock, and Skelly, Mantell, and Strong lost every time. Mantell and Strong didn't see anything crooked, but all of a sudden Skelly had a brain-storm and swore he did. He threw down his cards and started a row then and there. Dink, Strong's man, had been in the room till two and then drifted away. Jack-knife and the Featherbed, the Boscós' handy men, didn't play, of course. They were merely watchers and errand boys. Others were in and out, but they don't count. When the argument started, the six players—the two Boscós, Strong and Mantell, Skelly and Wallis, and the two gangsters, Jack-knife and the Featherbed, were in the room.

"But I thought they couldn't prove that Tony Bosco—"

"Wait a minute. That's the point. I tell you I'm giving you the underworld dope."

"Sorry. I won't interrupt again."

"All right. . . . Where was I? . . . Oh, yes. All

six men were on their feet now, and here's the way they were standing."

Young Wheeler, who was given to maps and diagrams, made a lay-out with salt-cellars, spoons, and glasses.

"Skelly did some mighty rough talking. They all agreed on that. He told the Boscos just what he thought of them, and he thought plenty. He said things men of that sort don't forgive."

Barry remembered the loud voices in the room off the corridor.

"Strong and Mantell tried to quiet him. They told him the Boscos had played a straight game, but that made Skelly more furious than ever. He raved around, cursing them all, even Strong and Mantell; swore they were in with the Boscos; swore he'd never pay a cent to any of them! He seemed to be working the venom out of his system, though, and getting quieter, so Mantell decided the worst was over and went off to the wash-room. Strong suggested that they all have a drink. In his lunging about, Skelly had knocked the bottles off the table and Strong went to a corner table and drew the cork out of a full bottle of whisky standing there. For those few seconds, no more than that, he was standing with his back to the others. See?

"Neither Strong nor Mantell had the slightest notion that there was to be any shooting. I don't think the others had, either. But Skelly was still cursing and accusing the Boscos and swearing that he'd drive them out of the country. In those two seconds, while he stood with his back to them, opening that whisky bottle, Strong heard

the shots behind him. He's as quick as most of that crowd, and they're all amazingly light on their feet. When he turned, Skelly was still standing but crumpled up over the table, and Tony Bosco was so close to Skelly he was almost touching him. Skelly had his back to Strong. Jim Bosco was opposite Skelly, and Wallis and the two gangsters, Jack-knife and the Featherbed, were at the other side of the table, with their eyes sticking out of their heads. See? Everybody on the other side of the table but Skelly, with his back to Brian, Tony next to Skelly, and Brian himself in the corner back of Skelly and Tony. If that's true, you see, Strong couldn't possibly have shot Dan in the belly."

"He couldn't anyway . . . or anywhere."

Wheeler ignored this.

"Strong saw them all," he went on, "but it was the tableau made by the Boscos that hit him hardest. If ever two faces told a whole story, theirs did. At least that's the dope I've been given. Big Jim was staring across the table at his brother, with utter amazement and horror in his face, and Tony was simply livid with fright. The next instant the lights went out, quicker, probably, than those in the big room. I suppose one of the gangsters switched them off. But Strong knew what had happened, and I guess it wasn't long before he knew what would happen to him."

"But if Tony Bosco shot Skelly I don't see—"

"I'm telling you," Wheeler said patiently. "What had happened was this. No one had intended to do any killing. Skelly alive was worth more to the Boscos than Skelly dead. But when Tony the Cat gets angry he loses

his head. He lost his head that night and he shot Skelly. Tony had been in countless knifings and shootings, but he never killed before, so far as we know, and his brother could always get him out of his troubles. When he shot Skelly he gave Big Jim some job; and the realization of it was right there in Jim's face and in Tony's panic when he came to his senses. Then Big Jim saw his way out. Tony's the one thing he loves, the very apple of his eye. He'd send a thousand men to the chair to save Tony if he had to, but he decided that one would be enough."

"Why couldn't he make it Featherbed or Wallis or Jack-knife?"

Wheeler groaned.

"Great Scott, man! don't you *see* why? Jack-knife and Wallis and Featherbed are Big Jim's errand boys. The police would know he gave them the job and the law would hold him jointly responsible for their actions. No, there was a victim right there, all ready for the sacrifice; and if Big Jim didn't remember it that night, I bet he did early the next morning. So now we'll have Featherbed and the Jack-knife and Wallis all swearing that Tony Bosco wasn't even in the room and that they saw Strong fire the shots. Nice for Strong, isn't it?"

"But why don't you print all this, if you know it?"

"I don't *know* it. I've been told it, and it sounds all right. But how are we going to prove it? Mantell will testify that Tony was one of the players, but it's his word and Strong's against the other four."

"I should think the word of two decent men would go farther than the word of a hundred gangsters," Barry muttered.

"The public doesn't consider Strong and Mantell decent men, by our standards," Wheeler pointed out. "They're said to be square players, but look at the crowd they associate with! The public will consider them all birds of a feather. So will the jury, when Strong's trial comes on."

Wheeler grinned at his host. He had eaten a good luncheon. But Barry, he now realized, had eaten nothing.

"Say, Cabot," he said urgently, "I wish you'd let me publish the stuff you've given me to-day, about hearing loud voices and seeing Skelly wabbling in the corridor. It isn't important, but it's damned hard to get anything new on this case."

"Not on your life! I'm glad I muzzled you before we started."

Wheeler nodded understandingly.

"I suppose it wouldn't make a nice frame for your picture as a bank president." He glanced at his watch and jumped to his feet. "By Jove! I ought to have been downtown half an hour ago. Keep me posted, Cabot, and let me know if there's anything I can do. I'm awfully interested in all this."

He shook hands warmly and dashed off, and Barry returned to the bank, considering his situation as called up by Wheeler's words: "It wouldn't make a nice frame for your picture as a bank president."

As a small boy he had sometimes bitten on an aching tooth to make it feel worse. Following that policy, he turned his thoughts to Janet and her expression when they parted. He had failed her that night and now he

knew it. A little sympathy, a little interest, a little tenderness would have brought out the recital of her plans and he could have persuaded her to include him in them—to the degree, at least, of keeping in touch with him. But, as she had told him, he had never had to think of any one but himself, so he had never learned how to do it. He was learning now.

CHAPTER X

MANTELL TAKES A HAND

JANET'S explanation came the second morning after her abrupt departure. It would, of course, Barry reflected. Janet was not the sort of girl to subject a man to unnecessary torture. But the letter held no suggestion of conscious power to torture the person to whom she wrote it. Instead, Janet seemed successfully engaged in torturing herself. The letter was on Barry's tray, and he read and reread it during the waiter's casual juggling with the breakfast service. It was dated the preceding morning and it ran:

DEAR BARRY:

Quite suddenly I have made up my mind to leave here—not by request of the management, but for several other good reasons. One was that as I am to lead a new life hereafter (how impressive that sounds!) I'd better get away from the scenes and associations of the former life. For another, to move is the only sure way of shaking off the gang. Some of them at least would follow me up, which they can't do if they don't know where I am. My plan is to give all my time to my singing and to try to "get somewhere."

I shall miss you, but I know that both your work and mine will go better if we cut each other out for a while. Later, when you have had time to undo the mischief I've

made in your life, I'll send you my address and we'll get together again. You've been a friend and a brother these last months, old boy; and while I've made a mighty bad return for all you've done, I shall never forget it.

Your remorseful friend,

JANET PERRY.

Remorse! Mischief! Barry dropped the letter at last, rested his elbows on the table and his chin in his hands, and considered the situation. Why the devil did the girl keep on talking about her mischief-making and remorse? She had been harping on her mischief-making ever since the Skelly episode, and during their talk the night after that affair she had seemed literally drowning in a sea of remorse. There was nothing to be gained by that sort of thing. It would hurt her and it certainly would not benefit him.

His lips set. Only the night before she left, he had told her there was no longer any danger that she would be called as a witness in the Skelly case. The same night he had told her in effect that he loved her. But apparently she had rejected both these assurances, and now she had vanished into the unknown, or had tried to do so, on the slender pretense that she was leaving him free for his work. As if he could do his work properly when he didn't know where she was or what was happening to her! The cruelty of women appalled him.

He remembered his cooling breakfast and gloomily poured some coffee into his empty cup. When he had drunk the coffee and eaten the congealed eggs and bacon on the tray, his mood brightened. It should be easy enough to find Janet. He knew the address of her

singing teacher and had faith in his ability to learn anything that unsuspecting artist knew about Miss Perry. He would drop in at the fellow's studio on his way downtown and find out whether or not the teacher knew Jan's changed plans. He might even find her there. She took her lessons at the studio and he remembered this was a lesson day. The new life might well include the establishment of earlier hours than she had kept of late.

But of course he did not find Janet at the studio, and he glumly reminded himself that he had been an ass to cherish even for a moment that iridescent hope. Janet never confronted even the face of a clock before nine in the morning, and as Barry took in the expression of her teacher he realized that she could not have bearded that outraged gentleman until the passing hours had given her strength. For Sanderson, too, had a grievance. He, too, had received a letter. Sanderson was a small, effeminate man, and his high voice grew shrill as he talked of his woes.

"She calmly informs me, here in the middle of the term, that she has moved and that she is changing her teacher," he piped. "She thinks because she has paid in advance for the full term that she can drop me and my instruction as if we were a half-read magazine. It's an outrage, an insult! Do you know what I'd do if I could?" He rose on his toes to emphasize what he would do. "I'd send that girl a check for the lessons she hadn't had. But how can I do that," he added with sudden resignation, "when she hasn't given me her new address?"

Barry left Sanderson alone with his sorrow. He had a fellow-feeling for the little man, but he had also the gravest doubts of his ability as an instructor. In Barry's opinion, any other teacher Janet selected would be an improvement on Sanderson. In Janet's Wheaton days, he remembered, hers had been a mezzo voice—with a full contralto range and quality in its lower register. Her speaking voice still held those rich deep notes. But Sanderson had seemed determined to make her a dramatic soprano, and in Barry's opinion the thing simply could not be done. However, he had no more opportunity to think of Janet. For the third time he was late that morning at the bank, and young Howson's face, when he passed the branch manager on his way to his cage, held the best imitation of Uncle Alfred's severest expression that Barry had yet been privileged to observe.

Owing to the time he had given to Janet's letter, he had not read the morning newspapers with his usual care. Over his simple luncheon he read the Skelly stories in several of them. Any doubts left in his mind concerning Strong's prospects were ended by these reports. As Strong himself had bitterly predicted, the gambler was It, and the events of the coming six months, so far as he was concerned, seemed plainly written on the wall of fate. Strong would eventually be indicted for the murder of Dan Skelly, but his trial would be delayed as long as possible. Not even a desperate police department and district attorney's office could start a case with the evidence gathered thus far. More witnesses were sorely needed. With a sardonic

grin, Barry told himself it was as if Dan Skelly had been alone in his private room all evening, had played a few restful games of solitaire, and had finally shot himself from sheer boredom. Not even the presence of the Bosco brothers in his room could be proved. A weak case, certainly, against Brian Strong, but the police were sure they could better it.

Barry's jaw set. If Hennessy had known anything about the silent companion he and Janet had sheltered in their taxicab two minutes after the Skelly murder, neither the detective nor his superiors would have made Strong the promise that young Cabot and the girl need not be called as witnesses. But Hennessy did not know that and there was just a chance that neither he nor any one else need ever know it. Everything now depended on how good a case the police could make out against the gambler, and Barry was sure Wheeler would give him "the inside dope" on that, in advance.

The hours crawled on. Cabot had learned, or thought he had, to put his personal affairs out of his mind during a business day. He had devoted much time to the mastery of this art, which he considered necessary to a man whose face was set toward the sun of success. But to-day the subterranean personal tide of his thoughts consciously ebbed and flowed. He took in and paid out money, smiled at depositors, went through the routine of his work with his usual brisk efficiency, but he also made plans. He would go to Jake's that night, have supper there with Miss Morris if he could persuade the queen of the club to give him an hour of her company, and either find out from her where Janet

was or get Queenie's promise to give him the new address as soon as she learned it. He was sure that Janet's vigorous new broom would not sweep Queenie out of her life. She liked Jake's leading hostess, and the latter had nothing to do with any member of the gang except Maizie. Maizie, he had learned from Janet, had never been more than a very occasional member of Jan's parties. Moreover, the relations between Queenie and Maizie were purely those of business.

He telephoned to Jake's that night before the rush began, and, having secured Miss Morris's surprised acceptance of his supper invitation, he reserved a table for two. Half an hour later, he entered Jake's club and looked around him with the interest due to this first visit. The place was still almost empty and in the brief interval before Queenie joined him he had an opportunity to observe that it was smaller than the Cockcrow, decorated less gorgeously and in better taste, and that, so far at least, the character of its clientele was superior to that of the larger club. Society and the arts had a fuller representation. The music was as smashing as the Cockcrow's, and a little later the dancing-space was as congested.

An odor of French perfume finally came toward him, accompanied by Queenie, who gave him a smile of intimate friendship as he rose to greet her. She wore a regal manner and a gown even more resplendent than the one in which she had called at his apartment, and she immediately revealed a frank conviction that it was not her personal charm alone which had led him to her side.

"What's eatin' you?" she elegantly inquired as she sat down opposite him; and when he cheerfully suggested that perhaps it was hopeless love for her, she cascaded on without resentment. "Just the same, you'll get led up the aisle some day for jokin' about serious things," she warned him. "There's many a dame that waits for no more than that before she ropes an' ties a guy."

After her cocktail she assumed the holiday look of one who has made a Sunday excursion to her companion's presence. She began her supper with a healthy appetite, enjoyed the champagne he offered her ("One glass a night is my limit," she explained, "so you'll have to finish the bottle, yourself"), pointed out some of Jake's most interesting patrons, and showed a characteristic tact in going to the point of his visit as soon as possible. She made no apologies for the morass she had recently drawn him into, though he knew she realized it.

"Why are you murderin' the hours with me, Big Boy?" she wanted to know. "Has Jan given you the gate?"

"I suppose it amounts to that," Barry admitted. He told her about Janet's letter.

"I've got to find her," he moodily summed up.

"What for have you got to? I don't see it."

He stared at his supper guest.

"You don't? I like that! There are two mighty good reasons. One is that I'm in love with her—"

"I was wise to that before you was," Queenie in-

formed him. "I was on before we wasted five minutes of our hot air, that night I blew in on you."

The detail did not interest her host, who rushed on with his confidences:

"The other reason I've got to find her is because, as you yourself told me, she needs me."

His companion shook her handsome bobbed head.

"Old stuff," she murmured. "She don't need you now."

"What makes you say that?" He snapped out the question and immediately apologized.

"Well, ain't she on the up-and-up?"

"She says she is."

"Don't you trust her?" Barry winced a trifle over this young person's embarrassing habit of going straight to the point.

"Of course I trust her."

"All right. Show it."

As he made no answer to this but stared moodily past her profile, his companion went on.

"There's a time when there's too many folks in the world for some of us," she announced. "Then we gotta flock by ourselves. That's what Jan's doin'."

"Did she tell you so?"

"She ain't told me a thing. She's give me the works, same's the rest of you. But I can see why, and it beats me that you can't. . . . Sometimes," Queenie added thoughtfully, "I wonder why us women falls for men, anyhow. Men are such boneheads."

"And all women are so wise!"

"I ain't sayin' it," his companion sharply admitted. "But at least most women sees their noses when they look in the glass, and all men seems to see is their front collar buttons."

"I suppose that's a very profound remark, Miss Morris," Barry said with deepening depression.

"Well, it's got an idea in it, which is more'n I can say of the remarks most men makes to me."

Her host revived.

"I'll look for that idea sometime," he promised. "Meanwhile, what do you advise?"

"I never advise nobody to do nothin'," Miss Morris forgetfully asserted. "I know better. Who wants advice? I'm *tellin'* you to let Jan Perry do a single act till she sends for you."

That twitched the end of a trailing string of memory. He was not to see Janet till sent for. He was not to see Strong till sent for. His mission in life, just now at least, was to help those he loved by keeping out of their way. The reflection was humiliating and very good for him. He hurriedly reminded himself that the condition gave one a chance to concentrate on one's work.

Miss Morris also experienced a sudden stir of memory.

"Listen," she began. "Ever hear of 'Ten Grand' Mantell?"

"I've heard of him lately. I suppose he's one of the six hundred that played cards with Dan Skelly, the night of the murder, and then changed into thin air."

The young man spoke so bitterly that Queenie gave him a quick look of sympathy.

"Don't be downhearted," she urged. "All the dirt'll go into the new vac-yum cleaner. But I gotta tell you somethin'. Mantell wants to see you, right now."

Barry laughed on two short notes. So there was some one who wanted to see him now, instead of later. And if he saw this gambler and happened to be seen with him, somebody else would want to see him very soon—one Alfred E. Howson. He shook his head.

"I can't afford to be mixed up with any of the Skelly crowd," he austerely pointed out. "Good Lord! I'm in trouble now up to the collar button you've been talking about! You ought to know that, Miss Morris."

She grinned.

"Sure I know it. Mantell does, too. That's why he had me rent him a private room—Twenty-four. You can slip in there an' get his dope an' no one will be wise. I told you when you 'phoned I couldn't give you more'n an hour, an' time's up now. But I wish you'd talk to Mantell before you leave the club."

"How does he know I'm here?"

"I told him. He ast me last night did I know you an' did you ever come here. To-night when you 'phoned you was comin', I got busy on the telephone."

Barry shook his head at her. He was disappointed, and too young to conceal it.

"I didn't suppose you ever did that sort of thing," he said remotely. She caught his meaning and flushed.

"There's no sawbucks in this, if that's what you're thinkin'," she said, with a coldness equal to his own. "But I'll do a good turn for a pal any day, an' Mantell's as white a man as Brian Strong is. They're blood

brothers, those two, an' he wants to talk to you about Strong. But Mantell ain't any more anxious for the limelight than you are. He's layin' low." She swallowed the last of her champagne and set down the glass. "That's the way it is. Take it or leave it. I gotta go now. Thanks for the spinach."

"Wait a moment. I'll talk to Mantell."

He summoned the waiter, paid the bill, assured the ubiquitous Jake, who suddenly appeared at his elbow, that he had enjoyed his supper and his charming companion, and escorted Miss Morris back to the hostesses' corner.

"Please don't mind anything I've said and done," he apologized as they shook hands.

"I know," Queenie assured him. "You're at a funeral just now, an' there's a real coffin an' real flowers. All the fun you gotta look forward to is the ride to the cemetery. Ain't it awful when you feel that way? Ask me; I know. But it don't last. In a day or two the corpse'll get up an' dance."

Barry sighed.

"Perhaps yours will. Mine won't."

"It'll do the Black Bottom," Queenie predicted. "Don't forget—Room Twenty-four. Goo'night."

Deprived of Miss Morris's luminous presence, Barry went to Twenty-four, which proved to be a small private room at the end of a short corridor. His tap on the door was unanswered. He hesitated an instant, then opened the door and crossed the threshold. The room was empty, but the electric lights were burning and a table holding a decanter, a syphon, two glasses, and a

box of cigars was as eloquent of expectancy as the two waiting easy-chairs beside it. He sank into one of these, lighted one of his own cigarettes, and waited.

Ten minutes passed, fifteen. "Ten Grand" Mantell did not show up; nor did any one else enter, or judging by the outer silence, even approach the door. Barry decided to give Mantell five minutes more. Before two of these had gone a man came into the room, closing and locking the door as soon as he had entered. He wore evening clothes and a soft hat, and carried an outer coat over his arm. This, with his hat, he threw on the nearest chair before coming across to Barry with outstretched hand. He was a handsome man in his early forties, with a slender figure, a smooth-shaven face with delicate features, graying hair, and the closed look of the gambler.

"It's mighty good of you to wait for me, Mr. Cabot," he said as Barry took the offered hand. "I got caught in an after-theater jam on Broadway and it held me up. We were only four blocks from here, but of course I stayed by the cab. I'm not running about in the bright lights very much just now, you know."

As he talked he moved about, pouring out whisky and soda for his guest and himself and adjusting a shaded lamp on the table. He offered Barry the cigars, which were declined with thanks, and lighted one for himself. Dropping into the second chair, he relaxed with an air of content. Barry took him in with interest. Strong's friend, and a stanch one, if he himself knew anything about men. With a promptness that seemed characteristic of him, Mantell went to the point of this meeting.

"I'm giving myself up, to-morrow," he said, "as a witness for Strong, of course, so I'm not welcomed with rapture. I expect to go in at my own convenience and to be out on bail right away. But one's never quite sure what may happen, and I wanted a word with you to-night. I sent a note to your rooms about half-past ten and got Queenie's telephone message a few minutes later. You didn't get the note?"

"No. I left my rooms at dinner-time and haven't been home since. I came on here after the theater."

Mantell laid down his cigar, with the air of a man whose business is too serious for such accompaniment.

"The point is this, Mr. Cabot, and I'm going right to it. I'm a friend of Brian Strong and I'm trying to do what I can for him. I want to say first of all that I've arranged this meeting with you without his knowledge. Unfortunately, I can't do much for him, myself, for by the devil's own luck I happened to be in a wash-room when the shooting was done. So I'm trying to find others who can help him. I'd perjure myself, of course," he added coolly, "but the four who were actually in the room with Strong and Skelly when the killing was done all know I wasn't there, and they will testify to it when they're rounded up. So will an infernal, interfering fool who was also in the wash-room when we heard the shots.

"They'll testify to a whole lot of things," he added grimly, "and that's about the only bit of truth that will creep into their evidence. I wasn't there, and that's all there is to it. I can tell who the others were and I will, when the time comes. But the man we're after has got

the prettiest little alibi you ever saw, and all the others will swear to it. Now—" the table was between them and he leaned across it toward Barry to emphasize his next words—"when Strong gave himself up to Hennessy, I was there and I heard Hennessy tell Strong that you and some woman friend of yours simply must have seen Skelly stagger out of his room after he was shot, as your table was within a few yards of him and you were both facing his way. That isn't important, of course, for they're not going to deny that Skelly was shot in the club. But Hennessy thinks it's probable that you saw some of the other men; one or two of them must have left the room that way before the lights went out. If you did . . . if you saw any other man leaving that room with Skelly or just behind him . . ."

He hesitated, but Barry did not speak.

"If you did," the other went on steadily, "It might mean a lot to Strong. It might even save him. For, naturally, the testimony of a man like you, with nothing to gain by giving it, ought to counteract the testimony of a lot of acknowledged gunmen."

"Yes, I see that," Barry soberly agreed.

"I see your position, too," Mantell went on softly. "It won't help you a bit in your busines life to be drawn into this case, and it's damned bad luck that you happened to be at the Cockcrow that night. Moreover, you naturally want to protect the lady who was with you. But when a man's life is at stake . . ."

"I know." Barry met steadily the other's gray eyes, which grew cold and hard as he listened. "I told Hennessy our experience at the club, and I explained that

the lady and I were out of the place within two minutes of the shooting. We were certainly among the very first to leave it, though possibly others got out at the same time through rear windows, which I doubt. As we were in pitch-blackness almost at once, there wasn't a chance to see anything. Both the lady and I explained all this to Hennessy."

"And he didn't believe you," Mantell mentioned. "That is, he didn't believe you had told him everything you knew." He added quietly: "Neither do I believe it, Mr. Cabot. You'll forgive me for saying that," he added, as Barry took this with raised eyebrows and a slight gesture. "I'm thinking of my friend. You see, what you know may mean the difference between life and death to him."

Barry leaned forward in his turn and met again the gray eyes that steadily grew darker. He would talk when the time came, if and when Strong really needed him. That was understood between him and his soul. But he was not going off at half-cock and he was not to be coerced, however suavely.

"You seem to be exaggerating my part in that affair, Mr. Mantell," he said.

"It may seem a small part to you," Mantell patiently pointed out. "In fact, I'm convinced that you don't realize its importance, and that this accounts for your attitude. But you certainly had a front seat for poor Skelly's entrance, and unless you were blind—"

"We may have been. We had all been drinking, you know."

Mantell looked at him a long moment.

"You hadn't," he then said, and added calmly, "There's a good deal more known about what went on at your table than you realize."

Barry frowned.

"We had a poisonous bunch there," he admitted, "and I don't doubt they're doing a lot of talking. Personally, I wouldn't accept a sworn statement by any one of them on any subject—except that of the lady I was with. But if they did see anything, why aren't they your witnesses?"

"They didn't see anything." Mantell spoke with weary resignation. "They sat with their backs or sides toward the corridor and they were all cock-eyed. Moreover, it seems there was a little private and personal row going on among them at the exact time of the gun-play, and the head waiter was just about to interfere."

"You're well informed," Barry conceded. "Can't you see what all that means? What chance had we to take in side issues?"

"That's plausible but not sound."

Mantell's manner changed and softened. He leaned still closer to his companion. "Cabot," he said very seriously, "you're a cautious and conservative young man and you don't trust me. I can't blame you for that. But answer one question. Do you think Strong killed Skelly?"

"No, I'm convinced that he didn't."

"Good! Great! Then why don't you help him? Have you any idea what he's up against? Do you know what they've framed?"

"Yes, I think I have a pretty clear idea of it."

"Then you know that it's a case of Strong's word against that of four other men, including Jim Bosco. The Bosco brothers are thicker than any other thieves I know. Their one redeeming human quality is their devotion to each other. They're a mighty close corporation, too. They have dozens of followers but no other intimates, and their power and influence—especially the older brother's—are amazing. What they say, their gang will swear to. Big Jim would go through hell to save his brother, so Ed Wallis, Jack-knife, and the Featherbed will all swear that they saw Strong shoot Skelly. They'll swear to that till hell freezes over.

"There's another point that won't help Strong," Mantell went on gloomily, as Barry remained silent. "Before the last meeting was arranged, Jack-knife and the Featherbed were always chasing after Brian with messages from Jim Bosco. He was seen talking to them in various places and that created the impression that he was a whole lot more friendly with the Boscos than he was. In fact, we both hated the Boscos, but now Big Jim is posing as a pal whose great heart will be wrung when he has to admit that Brian was in the room when the shooting was done! Of course he won't say he saw it. He'll leave that dirty work to his friend Wallis and the precious pair that clean his personal sewers for him."

"What makes you so sure that's their plan?"

Mantell smiled at the speaker.

"Naturally, Strong and I have our lines of communication. What I've told you is the core of the situation. Brian must offer his unsupported word. One

against four. You see his position. Skelly's debt to Strong gives the gang a fine hook to hang their case on. They'll say Strong was in the quarrel and got them there hoping they'd help him. That's an especially neat touch when one remembers that Brian went into the game through sheer good nature, and that he dropped over fifty thousand of the best for his trouble."

Barry drew a quick breath.

"It's an awful mess," he said in a low voice.

"I'll tell the world it's a mess, with a straight man getting the rotten end of it. Now Cabot," Mantell gave the other a deep look, "how about it? Are you going to help Strong out?"

Barry rose.

"I told Mr. Strong," he said, as he again met squarely the other man's eyes, "that I'd come to him any time he sent for me. We'll have to let it go at that."

"All right." Mantell had not risen when his guest did, and now the resentment died in the eyes he at last turned away from Barry's face. He drooped in his chair, shoulders sagging and depression in every line of him.

"That promise may mean anything or nothing, and I suppose it means nothing," he said bleakly. "I'm disappointed. I had counted a lot on your help."

As Barry moved toward the door, Mantell rose and followed him briskly, with another complete change of manner.

"I apologize," he said, and threw in a warming human smile. "I shouldn't have given you the impression that I haven't faith in you. I'm sure that for reasons

that seem sound to you you're keeping back a lot you know. Brian thinks so, too, but he won't call on you unless the situation gets desperate. I want you to do some pondering. If you find your idea changing, get in touch with me. Will you do that?"

He held out his hand with genuine friendliness and Barry took it.

"If anything turns up," he said, "I'll try to let you know."

"Ten Grand" Mantell shook his head at him.

"When you're ready to tell us the truth and the whole truth," he underlined, "and I'm believing you'll do it, my boy, if I know anything of human nature, don't wait for Strong's call. Come to me. I should say," he added reflectively, as they walked to the door side by side, "that would be well toward the end of Brian's trial, when you see that the case is going against him." He unlocked and opened the door and stood aside to let the younger man pass out. "Don't wait so long that what you can tell may come too late to help him," he ended.

Barry heard the door snap shut and the key turn again as he himself walked toward the coat-room. His expression as he went must have been a desperate one. He was asking himself why others could not leave him in peace; why no one was willing to give him the thousand-to-one chance that Strong might not need his testimony. His look checked Jake in his stride, as the club proprietor was hurrying past him.

"Anything wrong, Mr. Cabot?" Jake asked the question with more than professional anxiety. Like most of

the members of his craft, he was an earnest student of the faces of men, and he told himself that the stalwart youngster before him looked as if he had been hit with a brick. Barry hurriedly rearranged his features and added a creditable smile.

"Nothing at all, thanks. Fine place you've got here," he assured the proprietor. But as he put on his hat and coat and went out into a night that hurled frozen snow pellets into his eyes, he told himself that everything was wrong. However, he must keep his head, even though others were losing theirs.

The presence of the Cat in the corridor and near him as he ran out of the Cockcrow, and in his taxicab almost as quickly as Barry himself was there, was proof that the Cat had been in the Cockcrow during the shooting. It did not prove that he had committed the murder. Big Jim might have done it, or Wallis, or any of the others, or some one who had entered the room unseen during the quarrel and had dropped till the lights went out. The Cat's flight might mean no more than his own. Everybody had fled. Scores of underworldlings who had nothing to do with the murder must have broken their speed records in getting out of the Cockcrow that night. The Cat had been no more brisk than Barry in making a getaway, and the Cat's lack of desire to meet the police might have been due to their too eager desire to meet him in connection with matters far removed from Skelly's murder—that matter of the drug ring, for example. No, he wouldn't yet chat with anybody about Tony the Cat.

And yet perhaps he ought not to delay. If he came

out now, the relief to Strong might be tremendous. Hunched up in a corner of the cab he had entered, he continued to put the case to himself, his resolution wavering like a wind-blown flame. But the decision that came of all his thinking was the abysmal decision with which his reflections had begun—the decision to testify for Strong if Strong's life was really in danger, and to keep out of the damned affair till he was sure it was. That gave him time, and he needed time for personal moves of his own. He'd not let himself be forced into wrecking his professional future unless his evidence was really the difference between life and death to his friend. All this "dope" was so much guesswork. Didn't the police admit that their case was still weak? He loved Strong. He cared more for him than he had ever cared for any other man. But Strong had told him to hold off. He'd obey Strong's wishes. He and Strong would settle this problem without outside interference. He could reflect no longer, but Mantell's words echoed in his numbed brain like footsteps in a deserted house.

He was still recalling them three hours later when he finally fell into a disturbed sleep. At the same time, in a rear tenement room on the lower East Side, four men of very different type from young Cabot were earnestly considering him in connection with problems of their own. But this consultation, thorough and comprehensive though it was, would have brought no solace to Cabot had he overheard it.

CHAPTER XI

BIG JIM BOSCO

PHILOSOPHERS other than Barry Cabot have spoken well of the power of hard work to exorcise worry, and during the following four months Barry decided that their conclusions and his own were sound. He took his work as some men take drugs or drink, and it carried him through the days. His nights were hard, but he took no drugs or drinks to help him through those.

Since his talk with Mantell three things had happened, the most important of them, to Barry, being: first, that Brian Strong had been indicted for the murder of Daniel Skelly and was awaiting his trial; next, that no sign had come from Janet Perry; and finally, that Barry Cabot, despite his recent regrettable departures from the narrow paths of bank policy in connection with the private lives of young tellers, had been given on the first of January a promotion and a substantial increase in salary. The promotion had been accompanied by a few words of wisdom from young Howson, looking impressively like Uncle Alfred for a moment or two and after that very much like a good sportsman and a friend.

“Just one fling and a microscopic crop of wild oats

is the way I sum up your late goings on, Barry," he affably observed as he passed his cigarette-case to his assistant and then lolled back in his desk chair to discuss the good news he had just announced. "Probably this running around to night clubs—"

"Great Scott, man! I've only gone twice," Barry interrupted.

"I know; at least, I'll take your word for it," his superior handsomely assured him. "But you had been trotting to dinners and theaters for months with a queen of the night clubs, and every one knows it. Oh, don't apologize," he urged the offended young man. "I understand you've dropped her, too."

"She's dropped me, confound you! Now, see here, Howson, there's a limit—"

"Of course there is, and you were getting damned close to it, my lad. However, I'm not saying the experience won't be a good thing for you in the long run. It's opened your eyes a bit, made you more human. You were infernally near being a prig, if you ask me. Now you're a he-man, though I hear you're back at the Y. M. C. A. for early prayers and late gymnasium work. Are you keeping up your boxing?"

"Yes. And I could knock your block off right now," his friend announced.

"And you yearn to. I know," Howson said soothingly. "But Uncle Alfred told me to say a few serious words to you about the future and I'm doing it. I believe," he added solemnly, "that you're going to be a better, nobler man as a result of these recent diversions. In the meantime you'll have the satisfying inner knowl-

edge that you're not so pure as you look, and to the rest of the staff you'll be wearing the romantic halo of a reformed rake. It may be a hard spring for our lady clerks and stenographers who are still sighing as you pass, but—"

"You ought to have your secretary take down this 'Talk to Young Bankers,' and send a copy of it to Uncle Alfred," Barry impatiently suggested; and Howson laughed and sent him off with a clap on the shoulder and a command to save at least half of his new salary.

The promotion meant more work and Barry hurled himself into it with the zest of a man who has much to forget. He wanted to forget Janet, but he couldn't forget her for an hour. He wanted to forget Strong, and Strong was constantly in his thoughts. Both sought to help him, however, by ignoring him. The Skelly murder case had moved to the back pages of the newspapers for the time being, and even there it was dismissed with a few paragraphs. Strong's daily life in prison, having been described in considerable detail, had ceased to interest the public. The Bosco brothers were said to have returned to New York. "Ten Grand" Mantell, a witness, was out on bail. So were Wallis, Jack-knife, and the Featherbed. Various other gangsters, desired as witnesses, were still more or less elusive but could be produced, the police asserted, when needed. With the beginning of Strong's trial, public interest in the case would rise like a pillar of fire. Meanwhile, the present interval was helpful to a young man with a burden on his conscience.

Barry was daily at the bank ahead of time and he worked after hours. He had ideas and submitted them to Howson, who either jeered at them or serenely used them as his own. Barry went to a gymnasium twice a week, to a theater every Saturday night, spent Sundays in the country, and dined with Colonel Jessup Sunday evenings. His laundry went out every Saturday afternoon and came back the following Tuesday evening. The drawers of his highboy were full of clean shirts. Cheerful new ties hung on his racks. Outwardly he had returned to the strait and narrow path of the rising young man and once more his feet seemed firmly set upon it. No one but himself knew how precarious was his footing.

Despite the advice of Miss Morris, he had spent the first six weeks after Janet's disappearance in quiet but persistent efforts to trace her. He had even distastefully looked up various members of the "gang"; and had found his sole comfort in their inability to help him. He had put guarded lines in agony columns—all without result. His dreams were peopled by Janet and Strong. During his few hours of sleep he saw their faces, and Janet's wet eyes and drenched lashes. There were times when consciousness of Strong's situation overwhelmed him like a tidal wave. There were times when life seemed playing on his nerves like an unskilful performer on an accordion. But to casual observers he seemed a young man in a most enviable position.

Alfred E. Howson showed his approval of Cabot's return to normal life by twice more inviting him to dinner, and Barry found the great banker's only daugh-

ter increasingly friendly but not at all exciting. Colonel Jessup, with what that gentleman considered deep cunning, discoursed at intervals on the "niceness" of Nancy Howson and the luck of the young fellow who got her, but his guest could never be drawn into a prolonged consideration of the heiress's charms.

Instead, Barry was moved to talk about Janet Perry. Janet, indeed, had formed an embarrassing habit of walking into his conversations uninvited. The Colonel let him have his way; though he received with incredulity the account of Janet's change of heart and of her determination to give her life to music. Jessup was flattered by Barry's confidences and increasingly fond of hearing the boy talk about anything. Young Cabot was intrenching himself more and more deeply in a lonely old heart that had just begun to discover how lonely it was.

After four months of this, and with the last days of March, the situation changed abruptly. It may have been the spectacle of Nature's ostentatious advance that made editors point to less gratifying progress in other lines of effort. It was suggested that Strong's trial was too long delayed and that the delay was due to the hope that the fickle public would lose interest in the case. The newspapers proceeded to fan that waning interest. The police "got busy." The district attorney set a date for the beginning of Strong's trial. With the announcement of this date, Barry Cabot passed from his nepenthe of work into what speedily became a waking nightmare. Strong's trial was to start in May and to be rushed through. The public began to argue about Strong's

guilt. He had big lawyers to defend him, but he had few witnesses and not much of a case.

Barry became conscious of a disquieting aid to his inner turmoil. He was being shadowed. He had suspected the fact for several weeks before he was sure of it. He was ignored during banking hours, it being assumed, apparently, that he was safely confined by the bonds of his work. From the time he left the bank, late in the afternoon, until he was finally and safely in his room at night, he was conscious of being dogged—unobtrusively, skilfully, but unmistakably dogged. Slim young men given to sweaters and low-hung caps, silent-stepping youths with furtive eyes, seemed strangely interested in his movements. When he was sure of this, he stopped several times and turned swiftly upon his trailer; but the trailer always vanished into a doorway or around a corner and did not reappear until Barry had resumed his walk. He was never accosted or in any way interfered with. He was merely being watched and his ways of life studied.

These ways, being edifying to a high degree, may well have bored the shadowers. Certainly the shadowing bored Barry. He had never been alarmed. Though he realized the possibilities of mischief in these young men, he believed himself a match for any one of them—perhaps even for two. But he grew weary of their curiosity and it was an actual satisfaction to him to discover as he got on a train one Sunday morning, to lunch with a friend in the country, that a tall, husky young man he had observed following him several times in the past week was on the same car and was sit-

ting across the aisle from him, two seats to the rear. He decided that when they got off the train he and this youth would have a talk. A few seconds later his satisfaction was dimmed by the discovery that a second young man of similar type sat directly behind the first. They were young men of about his age, and their expression and general make-up suggested that they were not finical as to nice points of fair play in physical encounters.

Barry took frequent occasion to turn toward the windows on their side of the car and to get a good look at them from the corner of an eye. They seemed not interested in him or in the landscape or in anything else. Busily chewing gum, they stared straight ahead of them with vacant eyes, but when the train stopped at his destination he found them where he had expected them to be—behind him on the platform. Only two more passengers left the train at this station and these at once hurried away. Barry strolled to the end of the platform and the two men followed him. He wheeled and faced them, executing the little maneuver so abruptly that they had no time to turn.

"All right," he said with a grin. "Let's have it out, here and now. What's it about?"

They were young men not given to conversation and the address disconcerted them. Their jaws stiffened. Barry opened the cigarette-case he had taken from his pocket and held it out.

"Smoke up," he invited, "and let's have a chat. I'd like to know why you fellows and others like you have been trailing me for weeks. What's the idea?"

One of the young men took a cigarette. The other backed away with a muttered remark Barry did not catch. The youth who had accepted a cigarette now accepted a light. For a moment he stared into the eyes of the donor of these attentions. He was plainly about to speak. But before his unaccustomed tongue could find the words he wanted, a racing automobile shot around the corner and drew up at the side platform a few feet away from the group of three. The driver hailed Cabot with a jovial roar.

"Awf'ly sorry to be late," he explained. "Had to stop to let the train go by. Hop in."

Barry nodded to his two companions and hopped. As he did so the spokesman of the trailers found words.

"Aw hell!" he muttered disgustedly, and as further relief to his overwrought feelings took the cigarette from his mouth and with great energy threw it on the platform.

"Who are those customers?" Barry's host asked critically.

"A pair of fellow-travelers."

"They don't seem to fit into our rural atmosphere."

"No, they don't."

Barry spoke absently, for his mind was busy. If, to-day, he had come to the country for his usual Sunday walk, instead of to lunch with this friend, he might have had to reckon with those two fellows on some lonely road; and he was by no means sure that he could have handled them both.

His host looked at him curiously. He knew there was more to this episode than met the eye, but it was also

clear that this guest did not care to discuss it. He launched into a saga on the merits of his new car.

The incident was a good preparation for an unexpected call Barry received a few evenings later. He had violently objected to the Hellish Twins on the night of Skelly's murder, and he had no desire to see either of them again. But when the General brought him their card bearing the penciled line "Urgent. Must see you," the unwilling host ordered the callers shown up to his sitting-room. Only one came. Barry had no idea which of the twins he welcomed when the immaculate young man breezed into the room, but it didn't matter. He had reason to believe they were both messengers between the Tenderloin and the underworld and he desired to get rid of this pilgrim without delay. He had thought of Janet as explaining the visit, though the mental association seemed a disloyalty to her. Possibly this pallid youth had news of her.

The pallid youth had nothing of the sort. He was there on business, and after a perfunctory hand-shake he set it forth.

"Cabot," he said, "I'm representing a man that's anxious to see you."

"Who is he?"

"That I can't tell you. It isn't a time to use names. But he wants to see you about the Skelly case."

"Oh!" Barry decided that the man would be either Strong or Mantell. Strong might feel that his time of need had come, or Mantell might be considering another appeal.

"Did Brian Strong send you?" he asked.

"No. But it's about Strong. Please don't ask any more questions, old chap," the caller added. "I can't tell you who sent me."

"Why didn't he come here with you, whoever it was?"

"That's impossible. He wants you to come to him."

Barry reflected with surprise that the twin was doing his errand rather well. His manner, notwithstanding his caution in the use of names, was easy and natural.

"When?"

"Now. He wants you to come back with me."

This was different. Barry reflected.

"Which twin are you?" he asked at last.

"Cary."

Cary was the "poisonous one," according to Cary's twin, Charles.

"Where does this man want me to go?"

"Downtown. East Side."

It was Mantell, of course. Barry felt sure of that. Now that the trial was coming on, Mantell had decided to make a final plea for his friend. Possibly it was Mantell who had been having him shadowed, hoping to get some information about him that would make a turn of the screw possible. Certainly no one save some friend of Strong's could have any interest in him. He would be glad to see Mantell now, or any other friend of Strong's. He got to his feet.

"All right," he said briefly, going into the next room for his hat and coat. His guest was evidently surprised by this prompt acceptance of a somewhat cryptic invitation.

"Better take a cane," Cary said. "It's a rough neighborhood."

Later, Barry learned that the advice to take a cane was this messenger's tribute to an elastic conscience, on such occasions as the present one. Having suggested a cane, he felt that coming events were no longer up to him. He led his charges to their destination as the abattoir's pet leads his fellow-cattle to slaughter, and occasionally with similar results.

"We'll take a taxi," he announced when they were on the sidewalk. Seeing one coming toward them as he spoke, he ran to meet it, jumped on the running-board, and evidently gave the destination to the driver before the cab drew up at the curb, for he added no further instructions as it began its journey. Assured of success in his mission, he now proved himself able to lend his mind to lesser interests.

"Where's Miss Perry?" he suddenly asked.

"I haven't the least idea."

"Haven't you really?" The speaker was plainly interested by this discovery. "I thought of course she'd keep in touch with you, though she's given all the rest of us the air. Nice girl," he added kindly. "A little up-stage at times—"

"Would you mind not discussing Miss Perry?" Barry had suddenly discovered that among numerous things he could not endure, the mention of Janet's name on the lips of this wastrel came first.

"Oh, all right, all right. Didn't know you'd had a falling out."

As Barry made no reply, his companion also re-

mained silent till the cab stopped at a point under the Third Avenue elevated.

"We'll walk from here," the messenger said, briskly getting out. "Mind paying the driver?" he airily added. "'Fraid I haven't any change."

Barry overpaid the man, received the benediction of his grateful grin, and followed his guide into a serpentine street full of unusual twists and curves. However, he knew it fairly well. This unsavory region was one he sometimes visited in his noon walks, when he was making his studies of New York's varied phases of life. For ten minutes his guide backed and filled and doubled, until Barry finally lost patience.

"What the devil is all this for?" he asked irritably. "You're merely losing time. I know this region. Tell me the number and I'll lead you to it."

"Oh!" Cary spoke rather flatly, then laughed and shrugged his shouders.

"All right, come on," he conceded, and led the way down a side street to the entrance of a narrow three-story house that crouched between higher buildings. Near its entrance a choice collection of unemptied garbage-cans proclaimed some street collector's indifference to his high mission.

"This way," Barry's guide said, and, opening the front door with a key, he entered a dimly lighted hall. "Mind your step."

Barry hesitated. This was not the place in which a man like Mantell would seek security. The visitor to a new world experienced a touch of apprehension. He

had never admired those young heroes of fiction who plunged unarmed and alone into nests of criminals. He considered them fools, and on one or two occasions when he had met them in print he had thrown down his book in disgust. Now the sight of his own big shadow on the wall filled him with reassurance. His hand sought the added comfort of the loaded revolver he had slipped into his pocket when he went into his dressing-room for hat and overcoat. With that and a body six feet tall and full of trained physical energy, he ought to be able to have a peaceful chat with any denizen of this region who desired to talk to him.

"Go to it," he invited, and followed his guide up the stairs.

Their destination proved to be a room on the second floor and he had time to observe that the hall and stairs were clean, though empty of all furnishing save a dark-green carpet, and that the wall-paper was fresh, and gay with red roses. Also, from somewhere in the upper regions, he heard a deeply disgruntled infant broadcasting a lusty protest against the burdens of life. The sound further reassured the visitor and he grinned at the memory of the revolver.

Cary stopped at a rear door, rapped, and, receiving a response, opened the door and cautiously thrust his head around the side of it.

"Got him," he announced to some one inside. The next instant he moved back and waved Barry forward.

"Go right in," he instructed. "He's waiting for you."

Barry entered the room with a quick and compre-

hensive look around him. It was a large room, evidently running the full width of the old house and overlooking an open space in its rear, for one of the two windows seemed let down behind its closely drawn green curtains and the air that came in was not that of a tenement court. The unexpected luxury of an open fire burned behind a fender. Other details included more green carpet, a second pair of closely drawn curtains at the other window (green seemed the favorite color scheme of the room's occupant), a dozen big cane-seated oak chairs with arms, and a long shabby oak table. Many of the chairs were around this table and there was a suggestion of board meetings or something of the sort. At present, however, the room was empty save for two persons—a husky expressionless young man bent over a radio in the corner with a pair of ear-pieces on his head, and a big man seated alone at the table and facing the door. Barry cast a fleeting glance at the youth, recognized him, and let his eyes come to rest on the big man.

He was a very big man, six feet two or three inches tall, and heavy with a weight that held no suggestion of surplus flesh. His clean-shaven face was strong-featured. His hair and eyes were very black and his big teeth shone white against his dark complexion when he spoke. As Barry entered, he nodded and with a gesture of a huge brown hand invited the visitor to take a seat at the table. The chair indicated was opposite his own and with only the width of the table between them the new-comer found himself looking straight into his host's heavy-lidded black eyes. Somewhere

above them the baby continued to squall. The expressionless young man at the radio unwinkingly watched the new-comer.

"Yer name Cabot?" the host asked gutturally.

"Yes."

Barry leaned back in his chair and rested his hands on its arms. He had decided to be as laconic as the other man and to let his host take the burden of any conversation between them. The man was evidently Italian, but there was no suggestion of foreign influence in his speech. His voice was deep and his diction that of the lower East Side.

"Yuh was at de Cockcrow, de night Dan Skelly got his."

The visitor made no reply to this. It was an assertion, not a question.

"I got information," the slow thick speech went on, "you seen Skelly dat night."

Still the visitor remained silent.

"Did yuh?" the big man demanded, his voice showing resentment of the other's lack of response.

"If I did, why should I tell you?"

The visitor spoke courteously, but there was a quality in his voice that deepened the other's look of watchfulness.

"Because I'm astin' yuh. See?" The big man rasped out the response in the tone of one accustomed to command, but it failed to impress his visitor. So did the attention of the youth at the radio.

"No, I don't see yet," Barry said mildly. "You haven't even told me who you are. I came here be-

cause I expected to meet some one else, and I'm damned if I know why I should answer the questions of a stranger. If you tell me who you are and why you sent for me, we may get somewhere."

"Who was yuh expectin' to meet?" That point evidently interested the host, for he spoke quickly.

"I haven't the faintest idea of telling you anything until you give me a better reason for doing it than I've had yet," and Barry grinned at his vis-à-vis as if they were sharing a good joke.

Possibly the other responded to that good-humored and tolerant smile. Possibly he merely realized that he had made a mistake in applying his usual methods to one unaccustomed to and outside of them.

"See here, young feller," he advanced without rancor, "don't git fresh wit' me. I'm astin' yuh some questions an' I want answers; an' dat's all dey is to it."

"And I'm trying to tell you, Mr. Bosco, that there's a good deal more to it than that. You'll have to show me why I should answer your questions. Frankly, I don't see it."

He smiled again into Bosco's bewildered eyes. He could almost have laughed aloud. The big fellow, balked of the unexpected results of his usual opening, was so clearly at a loss what to do next. But Big Jim was not a man to be trifled with.

"Listen, young feller," he said somberly. "Yuh know me. Awright. Now we un'stand each other."

"Do we?" Barry was interested. "I began to be afraid we didn't. And by the way, Mr. Bosco, now that we've met, will you call off the Jack-knife at the radio and

the other lads that have been trailing me around town? They're infernal nuisances and I don't like any of them."

It was at this point that the Jack-knife took off his ear-pieces and gave his entire attention to the conversation, though he took no part in it.

"Listen, kid," said Big Jim Bosco, good-humoredly, "ye're a little fresh, but ye're awright. So far I ain't got nothin' again yuh. I sent fer yuh," he ended impressively, "'t' do yuh a favor."

"Really? That's mighty good of you, if it happens to be the sort of favor I like to have done for me."

"Yuh kin decide dat, yerself," Big Jim said indifferently. "I'm tryin' to save yer life."

Barry's blue eyes widened.

"That *would* be a favor!" he admitted. "But I'd like immensely to know why you are doing it and how you're going about it."

For just an instant there was an odd flicker in the eyes that had never left his face. It was not anger. It might even have been amusement. Bosco now proved that he had a sense of humor of his own.

"Yuh got me goin', kid," he said easily. "Dey been tellin' me yuh ain't no talker, an' dat was yer safety-belt, if yuh git me. But de way ye're wastin' hot air right now makes me wonder ain't yuh likely to waste too much somewheres else, 'fore yuh git t'rough. An' dat," he added with deep meaning, "is w'at I'm tellin' yuh not to do. Dat's de favor I'm doin' yuh—tellin' yuh not to hurt yer healt' by sendin' out hot air. If yuh use yer tongue to lick yer stamps wit', an' keep it quiet de

rest o' de time, dey ain't no reason I kin see why yuh can't live to be pres'dent of a nice bank. An' I guess dats w'at yuh want. De way I see it is dis: Yuh got bot' eyes on de main chance, an' yuh ain't lookin' fer no pois'nal troubles. Dat suits me, awright."

The vivid blue gaze that had been on Big Jim's face till now dropped, and Barry Cabot flushed to the roots of his shining black hair. Big Jim could not frighten him, but he could humiliate him to the soul, and he had just done it. The approbation of this thug was the last straw added to the heavy burden of self-contempt the young man before him was bearing. Very humbly Barry told himself that he deserved it. For four months he had been lying low, playing safe, hoping against hope that by some miracle he could keep out of Strong's quicksands and save his own peace of mind and his career. He stood up quickly.

"That's that," he said. "Now you've told me, I'll thank you kindly and say good night."

"Don't be too sudden, kid. I don't want no misunderstanding 'bout dis." The big man's voice was almost cajoling. "Let's have it all clear, an' dey won't be no mistakes. P'haps yuh seen Skelly at de Cockcrow dat night. It's nothin' to me if yuh did. But you an' me has got to be damned sure yuh didn't see no one else dere—no one I'm int'rested in. Git me?"

"Perfectly. You want to be sure I didn't see your brother. Two other men I know are just as anxious to be sure I did see him. It's odd," Barry moved toward the door, "but I haven't yet convinced those men that I don't see well in the dark."

"Goin' to keep tryin'?" Big Jim's voice was almost silky. "It'll be great fer yer healt' if yuh do!"

"You've made that clear, so I'll say good night."

Big Jim nodded.

"I ain't got n'more t'say," he complacently admitted. "We got nothin' on yuh, so far. See we don't git nothin' on yuh, *ever*. You ain't seen nobody but Skelly, de night he got his. See?"

"I see. Good night." Barry opened the door. "Is that your baby?" he asked conversationally, turning back on the threshold.

"Yeah!"

Bosco was surprised and showed it. For the first time he grinned and the young man at the radio simultaneously offered a brief dental display. "He's gittin' teet'," Big Jim unexpectedly testified with paternal pride. "Four to once."

"He's got a magnificent pair of lungs," the visitor commented. "But he annoys me. You wouldn't believe how many things annoy me nowadays."

He closed the door on this final confidence and went sedately downstairs. The light in the hall was burning, but the door-knob whirled round and round in his hand and it became clear that the door leading to the street was locked. An electric bell sounded on the second floor and simultaneously a young man emerged from a door at the rear end of the hall. He was a short and very stout young man with a round and pasty face.

"Hello, Featherbed," said Barry, cordially. The Featherbed grinned and unlocked the door. Barry

checked an unconsciously swift stride across the threshold.

"This seems a good chance to mention," he informed the stout young man, "that I don't want you or Jack-knife or any of the other lads following me around any more. I've told that to Bosco, too. If I ever find you at my heels again, I'll choke the life out of you."

"Like hell yuh will!" said Featherbed, grinning again. "Git t'hell outa here," he added good-humoredly. "We don't like de night air."

Barry's guide had disappeared and taxicabs were rare visitors to that region. He walked back to the Third Avenue elevated railroad, took a train to Forty-second Street, and there picked up a cross-town cab. In his room again, he went directly to his writing table and wrote a note which read:

DEAR MR. MANTELL:

I see very clearly now what Brian Strong is up against. I'm recalling a few events of the night at the Cockcrow, and if you will make another appointment at Jake's or elsewhere you will find my memory in good working order.

Sincerely yours,

BARRY CABOT.

He put this in a small envelop addressed to Mantell, inclosed it in a larger envelop addressed to Jake, and with an explanatory note to the latter mailed the document at once. The decision it represented was not one for which he needed another night of deliberation. After an additional hour at his desk he produced three more documents, one of which read as follows:

MY DEAR MR. BOSCO:

I have just mailed two sealed statements of our interview to-night to some influential friends of mine who are greatly opposed to casual murders. If I should be "bumped off," to use the vernacular of your best circles, these friends of mine will open the statements and will become very much annoyed and very active, and all that will be bad for your brother. Better call off your busy boys and fix your thoughts on higher things than my personal affairs.

Sincerely yours,
BARRY CABOT.

P.S. By a trustworthy messenger I am sending you this note and a bottle of Mrs. Winslow's soothing syrup. If you don't feel the need of the syrup, perhaps it may quiet the baby.

CHAPTER XII

BARRY HAS SOME EXERCISE

BIG JIM BOSCO never replied to Barry's note. Mantell responded at once and rather surprisingly. He wrote :

DEAR CABOT :

Strong, to whom I showed your letter, when I went to see him to-day (no doubt you know that I'm out on bail, myself), has been positive from the first that you'd come across as you have done. But in spite of all I could say to him, he refuses to let you act for him at present. He still hopes that some miracle will make it unnecessary for you to appear in his case at all.

The only course for you is to respect his wishes and sit pretty. There's no question in my mind that sooner or later he'll have to call on you. He asks you to forget him till he utters a hoot for help.

Gratefully yours,
DAVID MANTELL.

Barry dropped the letter on his writing table, with an irrepressible sigh of relief. It was one of his days of incessant inner turmoil and this reprieve was like air to suffocating lungs. Of course it was only a reprieve, but it would give him time to put his house in order. He saw his path very straight before him. With-

out waiting for that "hoot for help" which he too now realized would come, he must resign his post at the bank. He must enter the witness-chair not as an assistant manager of an important branch of Alfred E. Howson's bank but as a young man without a job and with no business prospects that could be affected by his actions. Having thus cast off his professional connections, he could stand by Strong to the limit, whatever the limit was.

After the resignation, not before it, he would explain the situation to Nicholas Jessup. The disapproval of Jessup's old friend Howson would not sadden him, but the prospect of his interview with Jessup hurt. He was becoming very fond of the Colonel and it was plain enough that the old man's affection for and dependence on his protégé were constantly increasing. Jessup made no effort to conceal his deep satisfaction over Barry's return to the simple life. He regarded the boy, if not as a brand plucked from the burning, at least as a scorched child who had learned to keep away from the fire. Occasionally his content found relief in words he vainly tried to make casual.

"Ever see the Perry girl now?" he asked Barry. The latter was dining with him the evening of the day Mantell's letter came.

Barry frowned. He did not like the way the question was put.

"I haven't seen Miss Perry since she moved," he said stiffly, "and I don't know any more about her than I did then. But I intend to start in now and make a mighty thorough search for her."

The words startled the old Colonel out of his comfortable sense of well being. He set down the glass of port he had been sipping and straightened in his chair with the manner of one going into action.

"Now, tell me, boy," he jerked out, "why are you going to do that? Why not let well enough alone?"

"It isn't well enough for me, sir," Barry assured him. "And I'm not sure it's well enough for Janet. I've left her alone this long," he went on as the Colonel made no comment, "partly because she showed so plainly that she wanted me to but principally because I didn't have the decency to follow her up right away. I had got myself into such a strait-jacket of caution and conservation that I'd forgotten how to act like a man. But even then I suspected that I wasn't doing the right thing," he ended with a bitterness that surprised his companion. "Now I'm sure of it."

"How do you know she doesn't want you to keep on letting her alone?" The host's wrinkled hand, of which the fingers were still slender and shapely despite his fondness for port, turned his wine-glass round and round and his eyes followed the movement; but his thoughts were on his guest, for the eyes were anxious and his face had sobered.

"I don't know that," Barry admitted. "Perhaps she does. But I believe she's having a mighty lonely time, and I ought to be standing by."

"Didn't you tell me a few months ago that you didn't care for the girl?" The thin hand still slowly turned the wine-glass, and the dim eyes still watched the revolution. Barry realized that those eyes were avoiding him

because they feared what they would read in his face. The discovery troubled him.

"I think I said I wasn't sure then just how I felt," he explained. "I admit that Janet gave me so many jolts, the first months we went about together, that I didn't want to be too much interested. I fought against my feeling for her. The fight was pure selfishness. I didn't want the trouble I saw ahead, if I let myself go. That's the naked truth of it. But lately I've felt differently. For one thing, I understand why Jan got out of the way. She saw how I was backing and filling, and the exhibition sickened her. It would have sickened any girl. It makes me sick now, myself, to think of it."

He stopped, but still the old man did not speak.

"She got out to make it easier for me," Barry went on, "but getting out made things a lot harder for her. She has turned her back forever on her wild oats; I'm sure of that. Wherever she is, I know she's leading a quiet, self-respecting life. She never went too far, you know." He spoke with such conviction that the Colonel checked the remark he had been about to make. "I'll stake anything on that. From start to finish, her dip into the night life here was due to loneliness and idleness and curiosity. Even before the Skelly murder I could see that she was getting fed up, and that finished her cure. She went away to work and put herself back into her proper place in life, and I'm sure she's doing it. But it's a hard job and I ought to be helping her.

"Perhaps I'm boring you with all this," the young man added self-consciously. "But a crisis has come in my affairs and I'm afraid I'll have to do a lot of things

you won't approve of. I want you to understand—if any observer can," he ended heavily.

Jessup drew a deep sigh, the sigh of depressed acceptance with which seasoned age takes the vagaries of youth. He rose stiffly from the table, forgetting to finish his port; and the slight omission showed his companion how far he had swung his host out of an established routine. Barry went to the Colonel's side and slipped his arm through the old man's for the brief walk to the library. It was the first time he had ever done this, and his host accepted the significance of the act as he was meant to take it. The boy was sorry to hurt him, but the boy was offering him the high compliments of confidence and sincerity. He let his weight rest a trifle on the strong young arm.

"I suppose all this means that you're going to marry Miss Perry," he brought out at last. She had become "Miss Perry" in view of that prospect, and Barry appreciated the change.

"I certainly am, sir, if she'll have me. I suppose if she had stuck to the white lights, I'd have tried to forget her. I might have had to. Perhaps we'd have driven each other crazy inside of a year. Now it's different. She has as much loathing for her old haunts as I have—"

"She may get over that, you know," Jessup suggested, as they entered the library.

"She won't. She's had a shock that opened her eyes. But of course," Barry added absently, "I can tell just where she stands as soon as I see her again."

He had spoken more to himself than to his companion

and he did not realize the full significance of his words till Nicholas Jessup broke into a high cackle of laughter. They had reached the waiting chairs before the library fire, and Jessup removed his arm from Barry's and smote the young man's back.

"In other words," he crowed, "you've given her four months to reform and you won't commit yourself till you're sure she's done it. Great head, my boy! But where's the passion that made the lads of my day act first and think afterward?"

"I never was impulsive," Barry admitted. "Perhaps it would be a damned sight better for me if I had been. I've just confessed that I don't show up very well in this affair."

He was appalled by his unconscious admission and humiliated by the Colonel's immediate understanding of it. Evidently others knew him better than he knew himself. Even the thug Bosco—His face crimsoned. The memory of Big Jim's final words always brought a rush of blood to his head.

They were in their chairs now, with a small table between them holding coffee, liqueur, cigarettes, and cigars. Barry poured the liqueur and the coffee. He and the old butler had discovered that the Colonel liked this little attention from him.

"I rather hoped you'd take to Nancy Howson," the host admitted as he accepted a demi-tasse.

"I know you did, and Nancy and I are the best of friends. But she's going to marry Ward Howson the first of June and I'm to be best man—that is, I was," he corrected, and then bit his lips over the slip.

His host looked up.

"Lots of things may happen between now and June," Barry murmured uneasily.

"Brian Strong's trial among them?"

Barry nodded, and for a time they smoked in silence. The old man was waiting for more confidences and the young man knew it and dreaded making them. At last Jessup asked testily:

"How about it? Do you think you may be drawn into the trial?"

"I'm sure of it." The young man pulled himself up to the announcement he had been trying to make. "I'm so sure of it that I handed my resignation to Ward Howson to-day. That's what I meant by saying that my affairs have reached a crisis."

Jessup started as if some one had struck him. With a hand that trembled he put down his cigar.

"I had to do it," Barry hurried on. "Please don't say anything, Colonel. I'm sure to be called as a witness, and it's only decent to let the bank be clear of me before I'm pulled into the mire."

He told the old man, at last, the full story of Tony the Cat and added his recent experiences—his talk with Mantell, the trailers on his path, his visit to Bosco, and its sequel. Over this last the old fellow uttered a half-cackle, but it was clear that the revelations alarmed and depressed him. However, the boy was telling him everything. That was much in these days, when youth and age hardly hear each other's voices through the wall that separates them. His feelings were divided be-

tween apprehension for his protégé and pride in the latter's confidence.

"I suppose the sealed envelop in my safe holds one of those Bosco documents," he muttered. "To whom did you send the other one?"

"To Ned Wheeler, a classmate. His father is Horace Wheeler, editor and owner of 'The Searchlight,' you know. I've had two talks with him, and he'll stand by. To-day I gave the whole story to Strong's lawyers. They'll spring it as a surprise at the trial; and until then, of course, there won't be any publicity."

"You're absolutely certain the man you saw was the younger Bosco?"

"Absolutely. Tony the Cat is unmistakable. I could pick him out among thousands. Even before I saw him behind Skelly, after the shooting, I saw him go in and out of the room several times. And I had all the time in the cab to impress his features on my memory. He sat directly opposite me and I took him in from head to foot. My testimony will be a torpedo to the Boscos," Barry ended. "Big Jim's effort to muzzle me shows they're afraid of it."

"And his threats, my boy." At last the old man brought out what seemed to him the most important phase of the whole matter: "Surely you realize that your life is actually in danger?"

"Don't worry about that. I'm in pretty good condition and I'll be on my guard every minute. I have no use for fools that take unnecessary chances."

The Colonel nodded silently. After a few moments

he asked a question so remote from the subject they had been discussing that Barry's lips twitched as he answered it. They talked of other matters; but when they parted, the young man looked at his host's face with a pang of compunction. The habitual serenity of that face was gone. So were its pink color and the erect set of the old fellow's shoulders. Jessup looked ten years older than when, at eight o'clock, he had welcomed his dinner guest. Barry wrung his hand.

"I suppose this is our last session," he told himself. "He thinks I'm wrong, all along the line, and he's through with me. I don't blame him."

But the Colonel's comments to his friend Howson, when the two lunched together the next day, were not what Barry would have expected.

"Perhaps the boy's a fool," Jessup summed up, "but he's a rather magnificent fool. All he wanted was to be let alone to work out his life in his own way, which would have been our way. He got caught in those damned quicksands through no fault of his, and he's sacrificing his future and his peace of mind because he thinks it's the decent and loyal thing to do. He's no cheerful martyr, looking at his halo in the mirror. He has kicked against his martyrdom at every step of the way, but he's going right ahead with it to the finish. That sort of conduct calls for character, if you ask me. But it knocks out a lot of my plans. I don't know whether to kick the lad or to pat him on the head."

"He's got character, all right," Howson admitted, but his voice held no admiration.

Barry walked up Fifth Avenue from Washington

Square to the Fifties, after his parting with Jessup, and turned into his home street. The apartment-house was half-way along the block and he was almost at its entrance when he became conscious that some one was trailing him, was actually at his heels. He turned suddenly, crouching low to avoid a possible tap on the head with a black-jack, and sent a swift right-hand blow into the pursuer's side. Simultaneously he caught the man by the throat with his left hand. The Jack-knife was tall, powerful, and a fighter. He had no chance, however, against the extraordinary swiftness and violence of these actions. The next instant he was drawn behind the ornamental grille fronting the apartment-house, and propped against the wall. In that sequestered spot, so admirably suited to his purpose, Barry held the choking, strangling thug upright, continuing his slow squeezing of the other's throat and emphasizing his words by tapping the back of the gangster's head against the brick wall.

"Now," Barry said, "we'll end this nuisance. I heard that black-jack drop as we collided, so I know just what you were up to. I'm not going to choke you to death, though I'd like to. But I'm going to come so damned near it that you'll never venture within a block of me again."

The strangling thug gurgled. His face turned red, then purple. He struggled like a wildcat, kicking and clawing. With futile hands he tore at Barry's fingers, trying to loosen that relentless grip. If he had worn knife-blades in his shoes, as he was reported to do, it would have gone hard with young Cabot.

"This is doing me a lot of good," Barry assured him. "I'm working off the annoyance you've given me lately."

Slowly but steadily he increased the pressure on the other's windpipe. The victim's eyes bulged. He would have gone down, but for the supporting hands and the prop afforded by the wall.

"I told Bosco the night I called that I didn't like having you around," Barry went on. "Trying the *sa-vate*, are you?" he added grimly, as the other made a desperate upward kick at him. "Do that once more and you may never do it again." He increased the pressure, wishing he didn't have to listen to the sounds the other man was making. "Armed, too, of course," he added, taking a firmer grip of the man's windpipe. "You chaps haven't much faith in your bare hands and I can see why. I'll take your toys away before you go. But first . . ."

The instinctive lust to kill, which flames up when one has his enemy by the throat, was hot in him. He knew how little mercy he could have expected from the Jack-knife, and his grip tightened till the victim's black eyes seemed popping from their sockets. Then reason controlled Cabot's impulse and his grip slightly relaxed.

He watched the Jack-knife carefully, on the alert for signs of collapse or of chicanery. When it was clear that the man could stand no more, he held him up with his left hand and searched him with his right, removing from the gangster's pockets a revolver and a sheath-knife. Holding the revolver in his right hand, he released his grasp on the other's throat, dropped the knife

into his own overcoat pocket, and let the Jack-knife's body sink to the ground. Then he stepped back a few paces and watched the difficult return of breath to the fellow's tortured lungs.

There were unpleasant aspects to it. Bosco's emissary had never learned to bear that sort of physical discomfort with reserve. Barry himself felt rather sick. He was experiencing the reactions of the successful fighter when he looks at his victim. The Jack-knife was increasingly noisy, and Barry frowned. If any other tenant of the house went in or out, or if some inquisitive pedestrian passed along just then, he would want to know what those sounds meant. No one appeared. It was after midnight and the residents of the region were in bed or at their favorite night clubs. When the other's breathing became a little less labored, the victor added conversation to his victim's sufferings.

"Let this be a lesson to you," he said pleasantly, while he kept the gangster covered with his own revolver. "I ought to have choked you to death, and you know it. No, keep quiet. Stay just where you are till I tell you to get up. Hold your tongue. If you can get as far as Forty-second Street, I advise you to take a train at the Grand Central station and keep going. New York isn't a healthy place for you just now. Do you feel refreshed enough to stand? No tricks, remember. If you try any, I'll shoot you."

The other was struggling to his knees. He spat out a choked utterance, unintelligible but full of venom. Barry looked at him curiously.

"Save your strength," he ordered. "You'll need it.

Stand up and keep your back to the wall. If you say too much, I'll give you another dose of the medicine you've just had."

With a mighty effort the other got to his feet. He was still panting and his black eyes were like slits of red flame in his congested face. The victor backed away and stood to one side of him.

"Walk through the gate and toward Madison Avenue," he directed. "Make good time. I'm watching you, and if you stop or turn I'll shoot. One, two, three, and you start. Get me?"

The fellow "got him" and hobbled through the gate. He was still having difficulty with his breathing.

"Now," said Barry, "on your mark! Get set!"

"Hell!" the other croaked, "I . . . can't . . . run."

"I know you can't. I'm not unreasonable. A brisk walk will satisfy me."

But it was a seemingly intoxicated man who reeled toward Madison Avenue, lurching first to one side of the pavement and then to the other. Barry watched him closely, and drew out his latch-key with a contented smile. A last glance showed the Jack-knife still unsteady but making better progress. Barry retrieved the black-jack, unlocked the front door, entered the house, and mounted the staircase to his rooms. As he walked into his sitting-room, he caught his reflection in the mirror over the fireplace and approached it with a startled exclamation.

He could not say that no alien foot had touched his territory during the late encounter, for his adversary's shoe had reached his stomach twice. It now appeared

that those frantically clutching hands had not always clutched in vain. Barry's cheeks and throat were scratched by long nails. So were the back of his hands. His shirt and tie were torn, his collar was in shreds, and he had lost his hat.

An impulse to go down to the scene of action and get the hat was promptly suppressed. The General might find it in the morning. In the meantime a hot bath and some antiseptic treatment of those scratches were indicated. But first he would put away the gun and knife and black-jack. He did so, humming the while the touching refrain of a popular song, "Among My Souvenirs." He was still singing as he entered his bathroom, but he did it softly, being always considerate of his fellow-tenants. The past half-hour had been a satisfying one, the best he had known since boyhood. It had bucked him up immensely.

The souvenir song was too sentimental for his mood. Something with more pep in it seemed demanded. His voice rose unconsciously and the sound of hot water running into a bathtub was mingled with the words of an old favorite.

"Hail, hail, the gang's all here," the songster warbled gaily as he stripped for his bath.

"What the hell do we care . . ."

For the first time in many months Barry of Wheaton was at peace with the world.

CHAPTER XIII

AUNT ANNE SPEAKS OUT

TWO nights later Barry had an unexpected caller. "A lady to see you, Mr. Cabot," the General informed him with the portentous air of a man burdened with a secret which is safe with him. "She don't want to give her name," he went on with even more than his usual deliberation, "but you know her."

"All right, show her up."

A mild hope that it might be Janet gave place to the sober second thought that it must be Miss Morris, as emissary from Janet or, more probably, from Mantell. But when he opened his door, it was not the dazzling figure of Jake's head hostess that stood outside. Instead, Barry found himself looking into the pale-gray eyes of Mrs. Perry, whose whole expression testified that after a life of obedience to the will of others she was now prepared to register independence, and to make a good job of it. His heart leaped and he welcomed her with an eagerness that almost startled her, while she was plainly relieved by it.

"I wasn't sure you'd see me," she confessed, taking the chair he drew closer to the fire, as the spring night was cool. "That's why I didn't send up my name."

He was bending to put a floor cushion under her feet,

and he interrupted this act of hospitality, to stare up at her.

"Not see you, Aunt Anne! For Heaven's sake, why wouldn't I see you?"

Mrs. Perry leaned back in the big chair and loosened her coat. At his insistence she also slipped it off. Her expression of determination was giving way to the pleased acceptance of a woman to whom being waited on is a new luxury.

"Well, for one reason," she murmured, "because Janet has acted very badly."

He misunderstood her, as of course he would do in the present raw state of his nerves. She had come to ask his help in getting Janet out of some new scrape she was in. He was still on the floor after his first-aid service with the cushion, and he continued to sit there, his right side toward his guest, his eyes on the fire.

"What has Janet done?" he asked at last.

"You know perfectly well what she's done. Going away with all that mystery and never sending you her address! It was a shocking performance, and I've told her so again and again."

"Oh . . . *that!*" Barry turned and looked up at her with shining eyes. His visitor's expression changed. She stared at him with an odd look of dismay.

"Then she was right," she muttered. "She said you wouldn't care, and you don't."

"You're all wrong about that, Mrs. Perry." The young man spoke very quietly. "I care a whole lot. The first six weeks after Janet left I spent trying to find her, in every way I knew how. I looked up some of

her gang, went to Jake's, even advertised. Nothing came of it and I stopped. I was just getting ready to start another campaign."

"Then I'm glad I came. You're a nice boy, Barry. You always were a nice boy. That's why, when I realized that trouble was facing Janet, I found the courage to come to you without letting her know."

"Trouble? What kind of trouble?" The host's apprehension had returned. "She told me in her letter," he added in a low voice, "that she was going to settle down."

"She has settled down. She's been wonderful. I'm so glad to be able to tell you that."

For a moment the new theme roused his caller to animation, even to enthusiasm. Her face flushed excitedly.

"Janet has been marvelous," she gushed on with the effervescence of a geyser. "She has dropped all her old crowd, and practised her singing three hours a day, and read a lot. She and I have been going together to concerts and theaters. Those things and an occasional lunch or tea at some restaurant or hotel have been our only amusements and we didn't have meals out very often. We didn't dare go to the best places, either, because Janet was afraid of meeting some of the old set. She hasn't seen one of them since she moved. She's made a few friends, nice girls, through her new teacher, but she doesn't see them often. She spends most of her time with her music and with me. It's not a life for a brilliant young girl," Mrs. Perry added humbly, and Barry absently agreed with her.

His visitor continued without resentment. Mrs. Perry

had never been a talker in the old days. To-night she talked as if to make up at one sitting for those silent years. The listener knew that she had not yet come to the real object of her visit, that she was deliberately postponing it, but her account of a reformed Janet was talk that ravished his ears. He listened avidly.

"You'd be surprised to hear Janet sing," Mrs. Perry went on. "She sings charmingly now. Her voice has that lovely rich quality it used to have. Vaselli says she'll never have enough volume for opera, but that she will develop into a good lieder-singer for drawing-rooms and small concert halls."

"I'm glad of that, and awfully glad of what you tell me about her complete break with her old life." Barry was increasingly interested now in what Mrs. Perry had come to confide to him. She had spoken of trouble, but he let her approach her subject in her own way.

"She's working very hard at the piano, too," the caller continued. "She has an accompanist every day, of course, during her practice hours: but she wants to be able to play her own accompaniments, on occasion."

Mrs. Perry's voice had flattered a trifle. Her thoughts were now on her coming confidence, but she had not yet found the right words to begin it. He helped her out.

"You said she was in trouble of some sort?"

"Yes, she is. We both are."

All the visitor's new spontaneity died as she spoke. Her words were so low that he had to come closer to hear them. He rose, placed a chair near her, and turned it so that he faced her when he sat down. But she stared past him into the heart of the fire.

"If it's anything about money," he said, "you must let me help you out, as a lifelong friend and neighbor. You know I can do it easily, and I'll be mighty glad of the chance."

His right hand lay on an arm of his chair and the visitor put hers over it.

"You *are* a good boy!" she exclaimed. "But it isn't money. Janet's father has just sent her a year's allowance in advance, and that ought to last us two years or longer, the way we're living now. Of course Janet's change of life has cut our expenses enormously. Personally, I could get along on almost nothing." She sighed. "So could Janet, if she had to. Neither of us cared much for the luxuries we had been having. You'd be surprised to see how simply we live now. No," she repeated drearily, "it isn't money. It's something much worse. It's a tragedy."

"Tell me about it," Barry invited, and those who considered young Cabot up-stage in manner would have been surprised now by his voice and the look in his vivid-blue eyes.

"I'm going to." She took up her confidence with the quick breath of one who goes at a task to get it over. "You've heard Janet speak of her father's friend, Mr. Haven?" she asked with a direct look at Barry.

"Often. I understand he's the New York representative of Mr. Perry's firm and looks after his interests here, including his daughter."

"Yes, he has done that since Janet was a baby. He has been wonderfully kind; and most generous, too. No matter how much her father sent her, here in New

York, Janet was always running behind her allowance. You know how she was squandering money last year," she interpolated, and her companion nodded. "Mr. Haven always advanced any amount she wanted," Mrs. Perry went on. "He said those were her father's orders, and that all he had to do was to send her father the receipt Janet gave him and get his money back by the next mail. Then afterward he'd show us her father's return checks to make us feel comfortable about it."

"I suppose," the young man broke in, between his teeth, "he's taking advantage of that now, hinting that she's under obligations to him. Is that it?"

"Not at all." Mrs. Perry spoke with sudden sharpness. "He's not that type, and Janet *is* under obligations to him. We both are, for years of friendship and kindness. He's been the only friend we could turn to; the only real friend we had, except you. He wouldn't take advantage of us in a thousand years," she rushed on. "But . . . he's in trouble just now. He's in great trouble . . . very great trouble. And I feel . . . I'm perfectly sure . . . that Janet ought to stand by."

"What sort of trouble?" Barry asked the question in a low voice, almost feeling that he knew the answer. From the depths of his consciousness a knowledge of something sinister was struggling up to him.

Mrs. Perry's voice sank almost to a whisper:

"He's been indicted for murder. His trial is coming very soon."

"Where?"

"Here in New York."

"I don't remember any Haven who's facing a murder charge. Mrs. Perry, do you mean . . . by any chance . . . Brian Strong?"

"Yes."

For a moment neither spoke. Then Mrs. Perry went on:

"It seems that he's a gambler, and that he uses several names. 'Haven' is only one of them. Instead of being a successful business man, as we have always supposed, he's the friend of blacklegs and cutthroats and thieves. Janet and I were both overwhelmed by that. At first we simply could not believe it." She spoke with a passion that surprised the listener, clasping and unclasping her thin hands with increasing nervousness.

"Perhaps Janet's father didn't know any more about that than you and Janet did," Barry said. "And Haven . . . Strong, I mean . . . seems to have met his trust faithfully, so far as you and Janet were concerned."

He felt the urge to defend, to explain, to talk. But Mrs. Perry interrupted:

"Yes, that's the whole point. He's been wonderful to us. Simply wonderful. And while he has deceived us, terribly, and the discovery of what he is has given us both an appalling shock, I think . . . in fact, I'm *sure* . . . that we ought to stand by him."

"How? In what way?"

"I think we ought to go and see him."

"And get into the newspapers? Mrs. Perry, you mustn't even suggest such a thing! It would mean nothing to Strong and it would be utterly disastrous for you and Janet. Can't you see that? You've just been

rejoicing because Janet was out of the lime-light, and you were right. One visit to Strong would offset the effect of all those quiet months. Janet would have the worst kind of publicity. The newspapers would print the story of her club life here, and the fact that she was at the Cockcrow the night of Skelly's murder—" He stopped self-consciously. "I suppose you know that she was there."

"Yes. She told me, not at the time but a few weeks ago." Mrs. Perry drew a sigh that ended in a groan. "Just the same," she brought out wearily, "I think she ought to go to see him."

"But why? For God's sake, *why?*"

"Because if she doesn't," Mrs. Perry muttered, "she'll seem the most ungrateful little beast on earth."

"Then let her seem ungrateful."

With a gesture of desperation Barry Cabot thrust both hands into his shining black hair, which stood up on end under the outrage. He was in for a contest with that most difficult of all antagonists, the stubborn meek.

"Let her seem ungrateful," he hotly repeated. "A young girl's reputation is something that can't be trifled with, and Janet has been playing fast and loose with hers for months. Now she's begun to guard it, for God's sake don't push her back into the mire that she's managed to crawl out of! Frankly, Mrs. Perry, to save my soul, I can't understand why you want her to do such a thing. To me it seems morbid."

"I want her to do it because it's her duty."

Barry's lips parted, but now his visitor's expression

withered speech. There was a meaning in those faded eyes before which he sat silent, struggling with a sense of combined consternation, fury, and helplessness. To remain sitting beside this woman was impossible. He got up, walked over to the mantelpiece, and, resting an elbow on it, stared blackly into the fire.

"If you make Janet go to the Tombs to see Strong," he finally brought out, "you'll be throwing her to the wolves. And Strong would be the last man to thank you for doing it."

"No, I don't suppose he would thank me," Mrs. Perry admitted, "but Janet owes it to him, just the same." Suddenly her face twisted grotesquely, and her voice took on the note of rising hysteria. "She broke his heart the last time he saw her," she brought out wildly. "It was the very day he was arrested, but he sent for us to come to his office, and he did all he could for us before he went to prison. And she broke his heart. I heard her doing it."

Barry left the fireplace and walked over to the visitor. The thing that was struggling upward through his consciousness had almost reached the surface. Standing straight in front of his caller, he looked down at her till she raised her eyes. The expression in his own eyes held them.

"Mrs. Perry," he said very gently, "are you telling me that Brian Strong is in love with Janet?"

"No, no! Good God! no!"

"Then . . ." He moved a step nearer, still holding those faded, frightened eyes. The thing was at the surface now and there was no way of ignoring it. He

demanded incisively, "Are you telling me that Brian Strong is Janet's father?"

The woman before him sank into a huddled mass. Head in trembling hands, shaking shoulders bent low, Anne Perry gave way to the tears she had held back up till now. Barry returned to his position by the mantel.

"So that's it," he brought out. "That's it!" He caught a reflection of himself in the mirror and with a shaking hand mechanically smoothed his hair. He must give Mrs. Perry time to finish her outburst. Perhaps that outburst would relieve her. He realized what she had been going through.

"Janet's father and your brother?" he said at last. "Or is it brother-in-law?"

"Brother. We both used the name of Perry."

"And you never knew what he was? Why did you think he was concealing his identity from Janet all these years?"

"I knew there was something. He always told me he wasn't good enough for Janet. He said he was a kind of promoter, without any business standing. He said she'd never have any social position or make a good marriage if folks knew he was her father. He made up the legend of a father in South America when she was a baby, and I kept my mouth shut. I had to. He made me. We were both dependent on him, and he is the most generous man alive. Besides, he simply adores Janet. She doesn't suspect it, but I've never seen such devotion. And to have her attack him as she did that last day . . . when she told him what she thought of her father . . . Can't you see the tragedy of that?"

Her wet eyes begged for his understanding. For a moment she wept again, this time more quietly. Then she went on:

"Naturally, neither Janet nor I ever dreamed he was a gambler or that he associated with criminals. I simply thought he was in some business he wasn't proud of. These last years I've been sure he was a big boot-legger. I've read so much about them, and about how much money they make, you know."

She wiped her eyes and sniffed depressedly. The truth was out and her storm of feeling was over. She was again the Aunt Anne he had known, waiting to be told what to do; but she made a final grasp at self-assertion.

"She broke his heart the last time she saw him, the very day he was arrested," she repeated. "She told him she despised her father and that she was sure he was no good. I heard it all . . . and saw his face. . . . It was terrible."

At the memory she seemed about to collapse again. But Barry had taken time to think.

"You've come to the right person, Mrs. Perry," he said simply. "I happen to know your brother. I was going to the Tombs to see him, very soon. I'm pulling wires for that now. As it happens, I'm to be a witness for him at his trial. I'll see him to-morrow if I can. I'll tell him how you feel, and then we'll all have to do what he says. I'll bring you back his answer, his exact words. By the way," he broke off to ask, "does Janet suspect that he's her father?"

"Suspect *that*! I should say not! And she thinks her

father doesn't dream of his real character. She thinks her father was deceived by Mr. Haven just as we were."

"All right. See that she doesn't learn any more. Give me your address and I'll report to you as soon as I've seen Strong."

She gave him the address and Barry made a note of it. Then he escorted her downstairs and out of the house and found a taxicab for her. Seated in it, she looked at him helplessly as he stood hatless at the cab door.

"He was such a good brother, Barry," she moaned.

"He'll always be a good brother," Barry asserted. With a mighty effort he had pulled himself together and now he smiled at her encouragingly. "He'll be acquitted, you know."

She shook her head.

"The newspapers say he won't," she murmured with the layman's vast faith in the authority of printed words. "But he's been a wonderful brother, and the kindest boy and man I've ever known. He was always doing kind things."

Barry knew that. As he mounted the stairs with slow steps, he saw again the mental picture that was becoming an obsession with him of late: the river . . . the willows . . . the man . . . the ecstatic small boy . . . Brian Strong's sister had no need to tell *him* that Brian Strong was kind.

CHAPTER XIV

IN A TOMBS CELL

“**I** HAD to see you when you sent me a thing like this, and you must have used a lot of pull to get in here. But I don’t mind saying that I’m rather disgruntled over your coming. That’s against the bargain, you know.”

Sitting on the side of his cell cot, Brian Strong flicked a finger at the penciled note he held. The torn envelop from which he had taken it lay at his feet.

“‘I’ve got to see you about Janet,’ ” he read aloud. “All right, boy. Just what does it mean?”

Barry, seated opposite him on a small stool, his knees touching his companion’s, was shocked by the change in Strong’s face. In four months the man had aged years. The visitor was not surprised. In such conditions, he himself, he was sure, would have taken on ten years in ten days. The air of the place was full of suggestions of dampness, of lack of ventilation, of unwashed human bodies. Near the door of the cell a keeper stood guard, with steadfast eyes on them. In the next cell a sleeping man snored raucously. Strong looked as immaculate as ever, but the life had gone from his eyes, the spring from his body. His shoulders drooped for-

ward and the corners of his thin-lipped mouth were down.

"Well?" he repeated with a touch of impatience. Barry could not speak. He was realizing what this man was suffering and the knowledge was as overwhelming as an unexpected wave. His throat contracted. He made a helpless gesture which the other interpreted with characteristic understanding. The kindness that was twin to it made the gambler drop a quieting hand on his caller's knee.

"I suppose this seems about the limit to you," he said with a quick change of manner. "You've never been in such a place before. But don't take it so hard."

One often thinks of trivial things at moments like this. To Barry's mind came the memory of Queenie Morris's words: "Some day the corpse will sit up and sing." Strong's corpse was the kind that *would* sit up and sing. The prisoner's poise restored his own. He ignored the snoring of the sleeping man and the inquisitive stare of a passing prisoner who was exercising in the corridor, and began his explanation.

"Mrs. Perry came to see me last night."

Strong looked at him with raised eyebrows.

"Mrs. Perry?"

"Yes."

Barry went on:

"You know—or perhaps you don't—that I've known the Perrys since Janet and I were kids. We lived side by side in Wheaton."

"I ought to know that," Strong said quietly. "It was the day I came to Wheaton to inspect and buy a house

for them that you and I had our little fishing excursion."

"It was for *that*? . . . But you never came back," Barry reminded him after a pause to take this in.

"No. I passed that way but once. It was ideal for them but not quite my milieu. And of course," Strong hastened to add, "having made sure they were comfortably settled, there was no special reason why I should go back. I suppose Mrs. Perry told you," he went on easily, "that I represent Janet's father in business matters concerning Mrs. and Miss Perry."

"Yes, she told me that—and more."

Strong seemed not to hear the last two words.

"I visited Janet at her different schools," he went on, "and I took her and Mrs. Perry to Boston and New York for occasional outings, but I never felt drawn back to Wheaton."

"Janet was always talking about Mr. Haven," Barry reflected aloud, "but naturally I never connected . . . I didn't connect you with their coming to Wheaton, either, though I remember now that they came only a month or so after that day. . . . And the name . . ."

Strong nodded.

"I used the name of Bleeker in my business with the realty people. And I rushed the Perrys into the house as soon as it could be put into condition for them. Janet's father wanted her brought up in the country," he elaborated. With no change of tone he went on casually: "What did you mean by saying that Mrs. Perry told you of our business relations—and more?"

"Because she told me a good deal more." Barry had

a gratifying habit of keeping to the straight line of any discussion. He rarely sidestepped a direct question. "She was very much excited and upset," he went on. "She showed that she was in great trouble about you. She felt that Janet ought to stand by you, and she came to ask my advice about it."

Brian Strong uttered the first bitter words Barry had ever heard from his lips.

"When a hen-brained woman begins to think, after a lifetime of neglecting the art," he muttered, "she gums up the whole works. How the devil could that girl stand by me? I hope you gave her your advice," he added emphatically.

"I did. Perhaps I gave it too strongly. Anyway, it made her feel that she had to tell me the exact situation."

"Just what *did* the amiable woman tell you, Cabot?"

Strong asked the question quietly, without looking at the visitor. His eyes were on his finger-nails, which showed that no manicure had recently been at work on them. Barry recalled their former high polish. It had been one of the few things about Strong he had not liked.

"She said you were Janet's father, and her brother."

Strong nodded again, but his face took on an odd pinched look.

"Has she told that to Janet?" he asked in a low voice.

"No, and I'm sure she hasn't told any one else. She didn't mean to tell me, but one thing led to another. I guessed the truth and put the question to her straight."

Strong rose, moved to the door of his cell, and stood with his back to it, facing his visitor. Barry started to his feet, feeling that his host wished to be rid of him, but Strong waved him back to his seat.

"That stool is a touch of sybaritic comfort I've added to these quarters, myself," he said in his usual tone. "Sit down, old man—that is, if you have time. I didn't want you here, for reasons we both understand. However, as you've come, I'd like to go into a couple of matters. You won't mind if I prow around a bit? I spend most of my time on my feet. The prowling-space here isn't good, but I get damned nervous if I sit still too long."

Barry nodded. He was having that odd contraction of the throat again, together with the fear that if he spoke his voice would betray him.

"Frankly," Strong went on, "I'd rather Anne, my poor sister, had kept her mouth shut. But since Janet doesn't know, and never will know, perhaps no harm is done. I want you to make it clear to Anne, to Mrs. Perry, that if she tells Janet, I'll never forgive her, and she'll know I mean it. I've spent the last twenty years keeping the truth from that girl, and it's been a devilish hard job. I've gone to an infernal lot of trouble to do it. I'm not going to have all that work go for nothing."

"I thought you would feel that way, but I wanted to make sure. Mrs. Perry thinks Janet ought to come here and see you."

Brian Strong came to Barry's side and held his glance with hot and resentful eyes.

"Is there no limit to the woman's idiocy?"

"She says Janet hurt your feeling by criticizing her father during your last interview—"

Strong waved that away.

"You tell my sister," he repeated, emphasizing every word, "that if she lets Janet know I'm her father, or brings Janet here or into court to see me, I'll never forgive her. I think that will muzzle her," he added more quietly. "She knows I'm a man of my word." He sat down on the cot and took his white head in his hands. "But why this infernal business has to come up now," he groaned, "with everything else—"

"It's over. You needn't give it another thought. Janet will never know. But while I'm here, Mr. Strong, I want to tell you something else," Barry went on resolutely. "I love Janet. I'm not sure she cares for me, but if she does I want her to marry me."

He stopped and caught his breath. Strong had literally flung himself forward and was clutching the speaker's shoulders in shaking hands. It was overwhelming to see the man's usual poise so utterly upset.

"You mean that?" Strong gasped.

"Of course I mean it."

The other relaxed his grasp. He dropped back on the cot and exhaled a shaking breath.

"Then nothing else matters," he said, turning a transformed face to his visitor. "With Jan off my mind, I can take any medicine the good old State of New York hands me. I don't mind admitting now that I've been half crazy with anxiety about the girl. Almost everything I have, and I've got damned little, will go for my

defense; and if I'm not acquitted, my daughter will be almost penniless in a year or so. That's all I've thought of, day and night.

"I even considered sending for Jim Bosco and offering to stand the gaff without defense if he'd provide for my family," he went on. "That's been done, you know. It's being done right now in a case I know of. But I couldn't trust that skunk. He'd make a payment or two and then sidestep, no matter what thumb-screws I left behind. Besides, I don't want him within a million miles of my women. . . . Lately I've been afraid I was going mad. But you . . . well," he drew another long breath and his shining eyes clung to the visitor's, "let them do their worst," he exulted. "I'll go to the hot seat singing."

"You're not going anywhere near the electric chair. You'll be acquitted. I can tell you a few things—"

"All right, boy. Tell me anything you like. But I won't promise to keep my mind on it. Let me confess before you begin that it was in the wild hope that you and Jan might get together that I selected that apartment for her in your building."

"You selected it? You knew I was there?"

"You bet I did. I've been watching you for years. After all, you and Jan had been brought up together, and I hoped that seeing each other again . . . But my poor girl had been doing her best to ruin her chances. I realized that. However, even the friendship of a chap like you was bound to help her. I didn't know how you'd develop humanly, but after I met you I was sure that at least you'd stand by Janet if she needed a friend.

And there was always the chance—a slim one, I knew—that you two might fall in love. But Barry,” his voice changed and his hand fell again on the young man’s knee, “in decency I oughtn’t to let you do this thing. Janet’s mother was a fine woman, as good as they come. But if Jan ever learns the truth . . . or if others learn who she is . . . well, you see what I mean. Looked at from your standpoint, I’m a pretty bad lot.”

“Looked at from my standpoint, you’re nothing of the sort. You know what I’ve thought of you all my life. You’ve seemed . . . well, you took the place of the father I never had. I’m going to try mighty hard to be a son to you now,” Barry added simply. It was a time when one could say a thing like that.

“Let me finish, boy, while I’ve the nerve to do it. There’s the question of heredity, too,” Strong hurried on, as if afraid to respond to the boy’s words. “In your eyes Janet must always be the daughter of a gambler executed in the electric chair. It may ruin your life. I went off at half-cock in my first relief, but I’ve got to warn you of what you’re doing. Have you thought of your children? The blood of the Cabots . . .”

“The blood of the Cabots be damned!” Barry stopped short, wondering if he had really said that. He took a moment for self-recovery. “Naturally, I see what you mean,” he went on at last. “I won’t pretend I haven’t thought about it. I’ve thought of every phase of it. It’s mighty sporting of you to bring it up. I don’t see why Janet should ever learn the truth, and of course I’ve got to remind you that so far as she is concerned

I'm still in the air. She's gone out of her way to avoid me. She may not want me. But my mind's made up. I'll move heaven and earth to get her."

"She'll take you, all right," Brian Strong said, adding under his breath. "What girl wouldn't?" He had the look of a man from whose shoulders a crushing weight had been lifted.

"And now I want to tell you something more."

Barry told of his resignation from the bank, of his visit to Jim Bosco and then to Strong's lawyers, of his recent trailers and his final encounter with the Jack-knife.

"You need a body-guard," Strong told him. He had made a gesture of desperation over the news of the resignation and had let it go at that.

"I rather flatter myself I've proved that I don't," Barry mentioned.

"Better let me decide. The Bosco gang doesn't fight in the open and you don't know much about their methods. I'll put Dink on the job."

"If you do," Barry said with set lips, "I'll choke Dink."

Strong's rare smile flashed out at him.

"If you try it," he reminded the young man, "you'll have your work cut out for you. You won't find another Jack-knife in Dink."

Barry rose.

"The important point is that I've burned my bridges," he said. "That being so, I don't see why you shouldn't let me drop in here and do anything I can."

Strong took his hand.

"My boy," he said with great seriousness, "you're paying a big price for a day's fishing, but there's a limit to it, though you may not think so. Do you remember the storm that was coming up when we parted? Prophetic, wasn't it? But to get back to the point. I don't need to tell you that Janet's the apple of my eye. She's all I've got; she's my one best bet. I'd have been biting these bars in another week in my worry over her. What you've told me has made a new man of me. *I'm all right*. Don't let me see you till the trial comes on. That's flat. By then you and Janet may have things settled. If I'm acquitted, I'll come to your private wedding as Mr. Haven, and after that I'll disappear from Janet's life for good. In a few months she'll get a cable from South America announcing her father's death. You two must make your new start without any undesirable aliens in your world."

"But—good Lord!—that's all wrong!" Barry broke in hotly.

"That is the way it's going to be, my boy," Strong assured him. And as they shook hands in parting, Barry knew it would be exactly that way despite any arguments he himself could bring to bear.

It was his last day at the bank—he had begged to be relieved at the earliest possible moment—and he had an interesting farewell interview with young Howson.

"Of course you know you're a damned fool," his overwrought superior assured him. "Why don't you work all this infernal Damon and Pythias stuff out of your system in a natural way? Run amuck for a few

days or weeks. Have a fling and make it as hectic as you like. Find a few baby dolls and play with them. Go to some prize-fights. I know one newspaper chap who went to a big prize-fight every time he began to have Galahad inhibitions. It always cured him—stirred up his nervous system and gave him something worth while to think about. Oh, hell, Barry!” he broke out. “You and I could have done a lot here. You’d have done the work, and I’d have got the credit, and we’d both have been happy.”

There was no resemblance to Uncle Alfred in young Howson to-day. He was all polo-player and good friend.

“Get out while the getting’s good,” he cried at last. “If you sit there any longer I’ll be sobbing on your shoulder.”

After banking hours that day Barry called at the uptown address Mrs. Perry had given him. The house was a well-kept building on a good side street, but the luxurious atmosphere of the former home was missing and the hall-man was but a dim reflection of the gorgeous General. The caller found Mrs. Perry alone, and as she put it “half frantic.”

“Janet’s gone out,” she began breathlessly. “It’s the mercy of heaven that she is. I don’t know what she would do to me if she knew I have told you where we live.”

“She’ll never know,” Barry promised. “There are a lot of things Janet will never know. I’ll make her think I got the address some other way. Now I have something to tell you.”

He described his visit to Strong and saw her face whiten during the repetition of her brother's threat.

"He meant it, too," he underlined.

"You needn't tell me *that*," she groaned. "I guess I know my own brother."

Partly to divert her mind, Barry included the confession of his love for Janet—it was a time for cards on the table—and her haggard face brightened.

"I'll go back to Wheaton to live," she said longingly. "I know everybody and there's a dear little white cottage on our old street that I can buy for almost nothing. I've had my eye on it for years. I've saved enough of what my brother gave me to buy it, and my husband left me enough to live in it, very simply." Her voice broke. "I can't endure cities any longer. They fill me with horror."

When Janet came in, the two were placidly having tea together and Barry rose to meet the startled newcomer as casually as if they had parted the day before.

"It took more than four months to do it, but I've reached your lair," he boasted as they shook hands. "Which will you have, toast or muffins? And the strawberry jam is great."

He bustled about, waiting on her, ignoring her silence and the tears in her eyes. She finally pulled herself together.

"I'd like to know how you—" she began.

"That's the dark secret I'm going to carry into our married life," he affably assured her. "And by the way, Jan," he went on coolly, offering his cup to Mrs. Perry

for more tea, "it may interest you to know that our married life will begin just outside of Boston. I've resigned from the bank and I'm going to take my shining talents back to New England, where I belong. I'll get a job in the Hub and we'll live in the suburbs. Aunt Anne's going to Wheaton. How about a June wedding?" He bit into his third muffin. "Nice month, don't you think?" he added rather thickly.

"You seemed to have settled everything," Janet remarked. He shook his head at her.

"Not everything," he reproached her. "Of course I've got to be sure that you love me before I lead you to the altar." He swallowed the last of the muffin. "I suppose this is as good a time as any to find out," he added thoughtfully, and drew his chair close to Janet's. There was a little rustle and a sound of retreating footsteps. Mrs. Perry, tactful as ever, was seeking the seclusion of her room.

It was not until an hour later that Janet Perry recalled a matter that had been much in her mind of late.

"Barry," she began urgently, "you've got to back me in something big." She related their discovery that "Mr. Haven" was Brian Strong. "You know what a wonderful friend he's been to me all my life," she went on. "I've simply got to stand by him, though I don't need to tell you how I dread doing it. It's been such rapture to keep out of the bright lights that at first I couldn't face more notoriety by going to see him. But now—"

"He'd hate it," Barry firmly assured her.

"You *think* so?"

"I'm sure of it. If you went to see him you'd add the last turn to the screw."

Realizing from the surprise in her face that he had put the case rather too strongly, he caught himself up. "Any decent man would feel that way about having a nice girl come to see him in a Tombs cell," he ended.

There was a long argument, which drew from him the recital of his visit to Strong and the story of J. C. Bleeker.

At the end of it Janet sighed.

"Perhaps you're right," she agreed at last. "I always thought you were right about everything, even when you were a little boy."

"I'm not, usually," her lover unexpectedly admitted. "Colonel Jessup thinks I've been wrong in everything I've done for the last six months. But you can take it from me I'm right about your visit to Strong, and about the wife I've picked out."

He kissed her again with the zest of a man who, having given up everything else he values for a friend and the love of a woman, is finding the renunciation worth while.

CHAPTER XV

BARRY TAKES A RIDE

BARRY had not been unconscious of the danger he ran when he went to see Brian Strong's lawyers, and his realization of this was quickened by his experience with the Jack-knife. That episode had made it clear enough that the Boscós wanted him silenced. He did not believe they would go the length of killing him, but it was quite on the cards that they might try to put him out of the way till after Strong's trial was over. Young Ned Wheeler, with whom he had now struck up a warm friendship, held positive opinions on this point.

"Don't be an ass, Cabot," he impatiently urged. "Two or three of those fellows will tackle you, one of these days, and you won't have a chance. Don't take any risks. Don't go out alone at night. Have a husky friend along with you. Above all, drop your Sunday excursions. Any one of them might give Bosco's gang just the chance they want. And for the love of Mike keep away from the East Side!"

Barry nodded. He was not foolhardy, and he realized that his success with the Jack-knife had been partly a matter of luck. The man who gets in the first blow has the odds in his favor. He kept away from the East Side

and confined his walks to the upper part of the city, which heretofore he had neglected. Enforced idler that he now was, he had plenty of time on his hands. Of course he took no body-guard with him to the gymnasium on the two evenings a week he went there, but he spent his Sundays in town with Janet, and even persuaded her to walk with him, though to Janet walking was the least exciting of outdoor sports, unless it was accompanied by golf. Occasionally they had a few rounds of golf at near-by clubs, but the links were not yet in good condition.

Twice Barry yielded to the country's lure, for the month was April and the season well advanced. On both occasions he took his revolver with him and carried a strong cane, and he saw nothing more alarming than a resentful dog who violently objected to this stranger's presence on the edge of his master's woods. Barry wished he had a dog of his own—he was very fond of dogs—but he considered it cruelty to keep a dog in town.

"When you and I are married," he complacently told Janet, "we'll live in the country and have a lot of dogs if you like them, too."

He saw a great deal of Janet these days. He was something of a nuisance to her, for she wanted her mornings for her music. Instead of leaving her to work in peace, he formed the habit of dropping into the up-town apartment and listening while she practised. Her singing amazed him by being quite charming, all that Aunt Anne had claimed for it.

Neither in the daytime nor at night did he see any

of Bosco's representatives trailing him, nor was Dink the Shadow in evidence as protector, as Strong had threatened. Life was almost too quiet. It had soft-pedaled Barry's nerves and he was glad of that. But the calm was the sort that precedes the storm. Strong's trial was to begin in another fortnight. Barry had submitted to two more interviews with the gambler's lawyers and had carefully rehearsed his testimony. He was, of course, making no effort to find another position. He had to be foot-loose till Strong's case was settled. He still dined every Sunday night with Colonel Jessup, and twice he had persuaded the old fellow to dine at the Ritz with him and Janet.

Janet was all Wheaton during these encounters—indeed, she was now Wheaton and good finishing school all the time—and he knew the Colonel was favorably impressed by her. But the old man was clearly breaking—partly, Barry feared, through disappointment over him. Life, the young man felt, would be incredibly difficult and confusing if one thought too much about it. He tried not to think about it. He was meeting unexpected difficulties in Janet's determination to do all she could for Strong. Having admitted that Barry might be right in his point of view, she continually brought up the discussion as if it were a new one. When the impossibility of visiting Strong was pointed out, she insisted on testifying for him, after Barry, with great difficulty, had secured the promise of Strong's lawyers not to call her.

"The evidence of two is twice as convincing as that

of one," they logically pointed out, "if the two are equally good witnesses."

To this Janet added her arguments.

"He's the best friend I have," she reiterated. "He's been wonderful to me all my life. I treated him like a beast in our last interview, for all I could think of was myself and my father; and of course I had no suspicion then that Mr. Haven—Mr. Strong, I mean—was in trouble. I must make that up to him."

Mrs. Perry unexpectedly and strongly sided with Barry, to Janet's indignant amazement.

"A month or two ago you were arguing that I had to go to see Mr. Strong whether I wanted to or not," Janet reminded her. "Now you won't hear of it. I can't understand it."

The argument took up much of the time they were together, but Barry accepted the condition with his new philosophy. Both wrote frequently to Strong, signing their initials only to the letters, and they alternated in keeping him supplied with cigars, fruit, and reading matter. Barry's conception of his present rôle was to be a son to the gambler so far as Strong and the law would allow.

It was in front of Janet's door that Barry's second and more spirited encounter with Bosco's representatives began and this time he experienced the first surprise and shock of it. He had taken Janet home after the theater one night and was turning away from the closed front door of the brown-stone house in which she had an apartment when his head was violently

jerked backward. Simultaneously a cold wet pad covered his face and the stifling odor of an anæsthetic filled his nostrils. Before his eyes were covered he had one second to take in the picture of a deserted street and of a big sedan at the curb in front of him, and to feel himself propelled toward the car. His strongest emotion was amazement. Such a thing simply couldn't be happening! He choked, gasped, drew in the fumes of the chloroform, felt himself strangling and borne upward as if on a great wave of it, and knew nothing more. . . .

When he again became conscious the sedan was bumping along a rough country road. Apparently the jolting had helped to restore him—this and the welcome night air that poured through the open front window of the car. His first moments of realization included, of course, the memory of the attack. Recalling that, he took in his present situation and remained motionless, with closed eyes, shamming continued stupor while he tried to think. His head ached viciously and he experienced a sickening nausea. They must have given him a large dose of chloroform. However, they were evidently willing to let him revive now. His right hand was near the pocket in which he kept his revolver and without moving he cautiously pressed the hand against his side. The revolver was gone. It would be, of course. But something was boring into his left side. He opened his eyes a trifle and, without moving his head, glanced sidewise.

He himself was huddled in the right rear corner of the sedan. A familiar figure sat beside him. Barry did

not need the quick glance of the fellow's black eyes or the sudden yellow gleam of his teeth to identify the Jack-knife. The latter tickled Barry's ribs with the revolver he was holding, and grinned more widely. He was in high humor.

"Listen," he coked. "One move an' I'll bore yuh!"

Barry ignored him. His eyes were on the third man on the rear seat—a big cat-like, silent creature crouching forward to look past the Jack-knife into the captive's face. Barry knew him, too, and turned his eyes from him with a slight inward chill. The man at the wheel was a stranger. He was as tall as the Jack-knife and not quite so heavy. The car continued to bump along the road, its springs protesting. The road was dark and lonely and lined on both sides with thick woods. No lights were to be seen.

"I'd like to sit up straight if you don't mind," Barry said suddenly. "I'm not very comfortable."

He saw the Jack-knife glance at the Cat, who nodded.

"Awright," the Jack-knife said indifferently. "Keep yer hands down an' move slow." His yellow teeth shone again as he quoted Barry's slogan during their last meeting: "No tricks!"

Barry straightened with difficulty. He was still sick.

"Mind opening this window?" he asked faintly.

The Jack-knife grinned again, but he made no move to meet the request. It was the Cat who, still in silence, drew down the car window on Barry's side and let more of the cool air pour in. Barry gulped it greedily.

"Thanks," he said. "That's good."

His brain was beginning to work. He was being

"taken for a ride." He knew what that meant in gangster parlance. Yet he could not believe that the three thugs meant to kill him, though the region would lend itself perfectly to crime. Certainly the Jack-knife had a score to settle, and his manner showed a lively expectation of the settlement.

"Three to one," Barry mused aloud. "That's pretty safe odds for you fellows, especially as you're all armed."

The comment fell to the bottom of the car and lay there. None of the thugs picked it up; but the Jack-knife's grin changed to a scowl, and Barry, who had no idea of adding to the dangers of his situation by baiting his captors, said no more.

For an hour longer the three rode in silence, the car making good progress despite the increasingly bad condition of the road. Barry's head felt clearer and his nausea had passed. The muzzle of the Jack-knife's revolver was still against Barry's side; the fellow's hand must be cramped by this time, though he had eased his position by moving slightly on his seat, his beaked right profile being turned toward the man he was covering.

The silence in the car, and that of the surrounding woods as well, became oppressive. A sense of the hopelessness of his position settled over Barry like a substance. Unarmed, he could accomplish little or nothing against those three, though of course he would put up a fight at the first chance. It was an ignominious finish and one that Alfred E. Howson and possibly even Colonel Jessup would feel that Barry had brought upon

himself by his stiff-necked policy. Looking back, he did not see how he could have acted differently. Looking forward, he could not take in the idea of imminent death. Would they dare? And yet they were the sort that dared anything. His mental state was a strange one—the suspended consciousness, the tense and almost unreflecting waiting, of one for whom no action is possible.

Suddenly the sedan swerved, turning into a narrower and even rougher road than the one they had traveled. After bucking along this for several hundred yards, it stopped and the outline of a building loomed before them through the darkness. Barry exhaled the breath he had been unconsciously holding. With Wheeler's stories in mind, he had expected to bring up at a lime-kiln or a pond or some other place nicely adapted to concealing a human body after the life was out of it. This situation looked different. It was just possible that he was to be kept a prisoner here.

Even as the thought swept across his mind a flash cut the darkness and the man at the wheel crumpled forward. The Jack-knife's revolver spoke at almost the same instant, fired through the open window at a figure on the running-board. The right door was wrenched open, there was the impact and pull of two straining bodies. Some one was handling the Jack-knife. Barry had just time to take this in before he hurled himself upon Tony Bosco.

With a lust for battle such as he had never known before, he reached for the Cat's throat. He realized that the assailant from the road had pulled Jack-knife out of the car, and heard the panting breaths of the two

as they fought. Then he lost knowledge of them. He himself was in a bear-like hug which held his arms pinioned to his side. He writhed, struggled, was conscious of a sudden agony in his right ear and of the trickle of blood. . . . He knew now that he had a match in Tony Bosco—more than a match, for, like his kind, the Cat was unhampered by Barry's fighting code. Holding his man a prisoner in his mighty arms, Tony Bosco butted and bit and crushed. . . . In those conditions, in those cramped quarters, it was all Bosco's fight, if one could call it a fight. Barry's blood roared in his ears. His breath was leaving him. . . .

The door on Tony's side of the car flew open and a powerful grip caught the Italian by the collar. It was so unexpected, so violent, that for a second Tony's grasp relaxed. The second was enough. With a last effort, Barry threw him off. Dragged by an outside arm, the Cat went over backward through the car's open door.

It was a long five minutes before young Cabot, out in the road now with David Mantell and Dink the Shadow, pulled himself together and fully took in the situation. On the ground were three trussed figures: Jack-knife with a bad knife wound, the driver with a bullet in his arm, and Tony the Cat, uninjured and impassive. Through his underworld wireless Dink had got word of that night's abduction, but not of the further plans of the gang. He knew the location of the Bosco's dugout in the country and the uses to which it had been put in the past. He and Mantell had motored there early in the evening, convinced that the

prisoner would be brought there. It was guesswork, but it was good guesswork.

Barry took stock of his own condition. His ear was bleeding badly, but the pain helped to clear his brain. He thought of Brian Strong, and of Dan Skelly, hurled into eternity without warning. He looked at Tony Bosco, who sat on the ground near his bound henchmen, stoically disregarding his own bonds.

"Have you taken away his guns?" he asked Mantell.

"Sure! And you're right about 'guns.' He had two."

"He would. Any knives left in his pockets?"

"No, he's frisked."

"All right. Now Mantell . . . and Dink . . . you've done a lot for me to-night, but I want you to do something more. I'm going to lick that fellow; I've simply got to. I'm not in the condition I'd choose for it, but this is my one chance to give him what's coming to him. He's going to fight and he's going to fight fair. It's up to you and Dink to see that he does it. Dink, take one of his own guns and keep him covered. If he starts to chew off my other ear or use his knee on me or do any other little stunt of that kind, shoot him—in the arm or the leg or some other non-vital spot. Hear that, Tony? You're going to fight; and for once in your life you're going to fight like a regular fellow. This will be bare knuckles to a finish, and if I don't put you down and out on the level, I'll eat one of your ears to make up for the one of mine you've chewed. Get him ready, boys."

If the prospect of fair fighting disturbed Tony the Cat, he showed no sign of it. Neither did he speak, but

his eyes gleamed. The injured driver of the thugs ignored both the conversation and the subsequent fight. The bullet which had entered his arm had broken a bone, and he was in agony. But Jack-knife sat up, livid-faced and bleeding through his improvised bandage, and silently watched the fight throughout.

It was a good fight and a sportsman-like one. Both men had stripped to their waists, and Tony Bosco's superb muscles raised an interrogation-point in young Cabot's mind as he looked at them. Despite the chloroform, he himself now felt steady and in fighting trim. He would have gotten out of his grave, he told himself, for the chance of fighting Tony Bosco. It soon became clear that Tony knew all about boxing and the rules of the game, though possibly he had never before followed the latter. He obeyed them punctiliously tonight, and between rounds, on a bit of level green sod brilliantly lit by the headlights of the two automobiles, Dink the Shadow, disgustingly acting as the Cat's second, gave him such primitive service as Mantell was able to offer Barry, while Mantell also acted as time-keeper and referee.

"I should think you'd enjoy a fair fight for once," Barry muttered in the third round and, his attention distracted by his own chattiness, was promptly knocked across the ring for the gibe. After this he gave his whole attention to the business in hand, and took an amount of battering he had never dreamed he could stand. Bosco drew first blood, but one gleaming eye of Tony the Cat was closed before the fifth round, and remained useless to the finish. He went down three

times to Barry's twice, and the third time took a count of seven before he got to his feet.

Young Cabot's brain registered the progress of the fight with gratifying clearness. He had neither the thick body nor the tremendous back of Bosco, but his superior speed enabled him to stop the gangster's furious rushes with the left fist which, his trainer had once assured him, "flashed like a sword-thrust." Impartially it caught the Italian in the eye, the jaw, the ribs. But the clenches were Tony's, and he had a right hook that filled Barry with respect and discomfort.

From the beginning of the eighth round it was Cabot's fight, and every observer knew it, though the Cat took his heavy punishment gamely. With one eye closed tight and the other half filled with blood from a cut on the brow, he reeled around the ring on unsteady legs, still feebly striking out at an opponent he could hardly see. Barry took pity on his helplessness and knocked him out in the ninth round. Tony came back to consciousness almost at once, and his white teeth gleamed when Barry bent over him. But the victor was not touched by this sign of amity, even when he looked at the temporary wreck of what had been Tony Bosco. He thought again of Brian Strong and of Dan Skelly. Moreover, during the fight Tony had hammered at his opponent's injured ear, and that organ was now so painful that the victor's sole desire was to get back to town and into the hands of a good surgeon.

While Mantell and Dink were rebinding Tony's arms and feet, the problem of returning the gangsters to New York was discussed with a candor that took no

heed of their sensibilities. All three of them needed antiseptic treatment as much as Barry did, and it was as impossible to free them as it was to abandon them.

"Think you can drive back to town if we untie one hand?" Mantell finally asked Tony.

"Sure."

"Can you see enough to drive?" Notwithstanding Dink's first-aid treatment, the Cat's battered face was still bleeding.

"Sure."

The three gangsters were bundled into the front seat of the sedan, with Tony's right hand freed for driving and Mantell and Barry alert in the tonneau. Just behind them Dink drove the small racing car in which he and Mantell had come to Cabot's aid. Within a few miles of New York, Mantell ordered the sedan to stop at a branch road, and he and Barry descended. Bosco, still at the wheel, was given his instructions to take the left road. His trussed companions were transferred to the tonneau and the Cat was ordered to start and keep going.

"Any one but Cabot would have left you three fellows out in that damp cellar you had all ready for him," Mantell told the thugs. "Dink and I would certainly have done it. But Cabot wants you to get back to town and take care of your injuries, so that's the way it's going to be, this time. Take it from me," he added in level tones, "there'll be no easy stuff if you try any more of your tricks."

There was no light of gratitude in the lowering faces of the listeners. Mantell and Barry, with Dink, who

had joined them, stood in the middle of the road, watching the big sedan skim away. When it was out of sight, they entered the racer and in little more than half an hour Cabot had disturbed the slumbers of an eminent surgeon, who was first resentful and then startled when he examined the injured ear.

"That needs stitches and a whole lot of attention," he remarked. "Mayhem, eh? Humph! What sort of company do you keep, young man?"

And he turned upon his patient the cold eye of one who knows the worst about him.

CHAPTER XVI

THE VERDICT

THE trial of Brian Strong for the murder of Daniel Skelly was as sensational as the newspapers had predicted it would be, and, from the day of its beginning, public interest in it came up like a rising tide. The superb fight made by Strong and his lawyers against an acknowledged band of criminals and gunmen aroused sympathy, and the difference between the prisoner's witnesses and the men who were trying to swear away his life was marked enough to impress every spectator in the overcrowded court-room.

But the gunmen had been well coached. Thin-lipped, furtive-eyed, laconic, they gave their testimony without apparent animus and in the fewest possible words, and every word counted. Even Max Steinhall, most able cross-examiner among New York's criminal lawyers, could do nothing to discredit their testimony except to bring out their records. Having proved that Jack-knife, the Featherbed, and Ed Wallis had each served prison terms, for crimes ranging from petty larceny to manslaughter, Mr. Steinhall, in a magnificent display of civic indignation during his final summing up, called the jury's attention to the characters of the State's witnesses and tossed the latter on the city's ash-heap,

with the expression of one who has poisoned his tongue by referring to them. He also made the most of the law's failure to produce Big Jim Bosco in court, as the district attorney had promised to do. Both the brothers had disappeared, for reasons Mr. Steinhall was sure he understood and which he also suggested to the jury during that final summing up.

But before this point was reached, an amazing pageant of human beings—thugs, gunmen, gamblers, waiters, racketeers, and Broadway rounders—had crossed the court-room to enter the witness-chair and testify for or against Brian Strong; and Barry Cabot, watching and listening from a seat as near the prisoner's dock as he could get, had passed through weeks of waiting nightmare. To him there was no drama in the gloomy setting of the scene, nor in the sharp contrast of types and testimony. The whole experience was a horror to be lived through with such dignity as one could produce. Reproductions of his photographs stared out at him from the front pages of newspapers he picked up. He believed the public looked upon him as a whited sepulcher, a trusted bank employee who had given his nights to carousing; he knew that even many of his best friends had put a mental question-mark beside his name.

Certain details of the court-room procedure never failed to give him intolerable pangs. To see Strong brought in was a daily agony. To see him leave the court-room for the Tombs was an even more unendurable spectacle and, absurdly enough, Barry formed a strong prejudice against a just and considerate judge

because that representative of the law never acknowledged the prisoner's dignified bow.

There were plenty of witnesses against Strong who were not gunmen. Two waiters at the Cockcrow testified that during his outburst at the end of the game Shelly's verbal attack on Strong had been as vitriolic and vindictive as his language to Big Jim Bosco, and that they, the witnesses, had left the room at that point and refused to reënter it, fearing trouble. They were meek and diffident men on the stand, seeming anxious only to do their duty and speaking highly of Strong as a generous patron of the club. Steinhall did his best with them, but all he could bring out was the palliating evidence that Skelly's abuse of Strong had poured forth when the latter was trying to act as peacemaker. They had no memory whatever of the presence of Tony Bosco in the club on the night of the murder.

"And they served him a dozen drinks," Mantell mentioned to Barry.

Other gamblers testified that in their opinion the friendship between Strong and Skelly had worn very thin during the past two years, and that Skelly had expressed great resentment over his constant losses to his old friend. "You'd think Brian was in with Big Jim!" one quoted Skelly as saying, before the agile Steinhall leaped upon him. A well-known Tenderloin rounder testified that he had overheard a quarrel between Skelly and Strong, less than a month before the shooting, in which Skelly had accused Strong of being one of the crows that were picking his bones. Steinhall brought out the facts that poor Dan Skelly was fre-

quently overexcited and always admittedly strong of speech, as well as quarrelsome, even with his friends. But the jury had grasped the fact that the two men had quarreled frequently, and later testimony concerning Skelly's big losses to Strong, and his failure to pay them, did not help the gambler.

The defense had three surprises for the prosecution and the public, and produced them with fine dramatic effect. The first was the evidence of young Barry Cabot, former employee in a leading bank, who had resigned his position, Steinhall brought out, that he might give testimony for an innocent man, regardless of its effect on his own professional career. Barry had writhed over this playing up of his evidence, but Steinhall had been firm.

"It will go over big," he had solemnly asseverated; and, indeed, it proved so interesting to the spectators that the district attorney started his cross-examination with an indirect attack.

"Mr. Cabot," he asked suavely, "I'm right, am I not, in my impression that you have known the gambler Strong all your life, though under various names?"

"I met the defendant once in my boyhood. I was nine years old." Barry smiled. "I never saw him again till a few months ago. I have met him exactly five times in all."

"Confine yourself to the question, please," the lawyer snapped, while Steinhall grinned triumphantly.

To his testimony as to the events in the Cockcrow, and the presence of Tony Bosco there and in the cab, Barry added the account of his trailers, his visit to Big

Jim Bosco, the threats made by Bosco, and the later experiences with Tony and his earnest followers. The spectators listened avidly. This was the most dramatic testimony offered during the trial; and while it was constantly objected to and much of it was stricken out, the jury, as Mantell expressed it, "got an earful."

"Were you and the man Bosco alone in the cab, Mr. Cabot?" the district attorney gently inquired toward the beginning of his cross-examination.

"The driver was with us, and Mr. Bosco confined his conversation to him."

"Confine yours, please, to answering my questions. Were there any other passengers in the cab?"

"Yes. One."

"Who was it?"

"A lady."

The contented Steinhall rose to his feet.

"If my distinguished colleague will permit an interruption," he began, "I should like to save him trouble by explaining that this lady herself is present and that later she will testify in this case. As she is to take the stand so soon . . ."

The two lawyers wrangled until the judge suppressed them. Steinhall sat down happily and listened with respectful attention to the rest of the cross-examination. He had shot his bolt and got his effect, just as he had overcome the absurd scruples of Strong and Cabot, both of whom had acted as if a girl could be ruined for life by one brief session on the witness-stand. Lounging back in his chair with his hands in his

pockets, Steinhall told himself again that the girl was a pippin.

At a crisis when the case seemed definitely against Strong, Janet had gone to Steinhall's office, had told him of her presence in the club and in the cab, and had quietly announced her fixed and final determination to testify for the gambler. From this decision neither Barry's arguments nor Strong's frantic appeals from his cell could move her. The man who had driven the cab that night could not be found. Barry's testimony, important as it was, was the statement of but one person. She could verify it and she would do so. In the meantime here was young Cabot, knocking off a link of Strong's fetters, Steinhall was sure, with every word he uttered; and after him came the defense's second surprise for the prosecution.

Recognizing this witness, Barry learned at last where Hennessy had got his information. It was the unemotional head waiter of the Cockcrow, who took the stand after him and who quietly testified that as he was approaching Mr. Cabot's table, the night of the shooting, two shots rang out, and that, standing just behind Mr. Cabot's chair, he had seen Daniel Skelly reel, wounded, into the facing corridor, and had also seen the younger Bosco, known as Tony the Cat, emerge from the same room immediately behind Skelly. Tony Bosco, he also testified, had been in Skelly's room all evening.

The district attorney did his best, but nothing could shake the effectiveness of this evidence. With a fine

eye to cumulative effect, Steinhall called Janet Perry as his next witness.

As she seated herself in the chair, Strong turned and his eyes met Barry's. Steinhall, seeing that interchange of understanding, became suddenly thoughtful. He realized in that instant that there was something unusual here. He must be on his guard. Quietly and skillfully he drew from Miss Perry, first, the story of what she had seen the night of the murder—her brief view of Skelly and her short ride with Tony Bosco—and, next, her reasons for appearing in a sensational case with which, of course, she would prefer not to be identified.

She and the aunt with whom she lived had known Mr. Strong since her own childhood. He was a life-long friend of her father, who was a civil engineer in South America. She had met Mr. Strong on an average of four or five times a year ever since her childhood. She had known nothing of his private life. She had supposed him to be a business man. He had been her adviser and her best friend. She had decided to tell what she knew about the Skelly case in the hope that it would help him, though . . . yes . . . like Barry, she resented having this point brought out . . . though it might hurt her professional and social standing.

No, she had known nothing whatever of Mr. Strong's private life. Yes, she had supposed him to be a business man. The repetition was brought out by the district attorney, making his difficult way toward something he too felt but could not quite reach. Yes, she had been surprised by the revelation of her old friend's private activities. She had not dwelt on these, for she

had nothing to do with them. They were Mr. Strong's affair.

She had a great admiration and respect for Mr. Strong. He was the kindest, the most thoughtful, the gentlest-natured man she had ever known. That he could commit a murder was incredible. He was the sort who would risk his life to save another. The district attorney checked her sharply, but Steinhall gave her a later chance to express her conviction that Brian Strong was the type who would give his life for a friend. Both lawyers were walking cautiously on what a sixth sense warned them was thin ice. Barry and Strong hardly breathed. Mantell, in his place beside the former, looked curiously from one white face to the other. He too felt but did not understand the presence of thin ice.

Then it was over, and Miss Perry left the stand with the flag of her self-respect flying, though the district attorney had given her a bad ten minutes over her night-club life and associates. That, he had suddenly decided, was the thin ice. Janet kept safely on its surface. She had been a stranger in New York, lonely, curious, and foolish, she frankly admitted. She had visited the night clubs, yes, very frequently, and had formed in her inexperience some undesirable acquaintances. She had visited no club since the murder, and had dropped her Bohemian circle. This, of course to Mr. Steinhall, after the bad ten minutes had ended.

Then it was over, safely over, and Barry and Strong breathed again. Janet left the court-room at once with Mrs. Perry. She was not, it was understood, to enter it again. As she came down from the stand she smiled

at Strong and the gambler forced his stiff lips to smile back at her. Mantell dropped his eyes and Barry marveled. Truly, Brian Strong was a man who kept his own council. Neither his best friend nor his lawyer knew who Janet Perry was.

The testimony of Mantell and then of Strong himself formed, of course, the capstone of the structure Steinhall was slowly building. There followed the testimony of a number of character witnesses who expressed their conviction that Strong was the least quarrelsome man they knew, the least hot-headed, the most kindly. It was amazing how much the man's humanity was emphasized during that trial. Just as, in all trials, witnesses come forward eager to comb the past for facts which may help to condemn a defendant, so old acquaintances came to speak of Brian Strong's innate and invariable kindness and to give instances of it under which the district attorney grew increasingly impatient. But he had also delved into the past for witnesses who hooked from the pools of memory less attractive catches.

The trial went on—endlessly, it seemed, to the three men most concerned; endlessly, it seemed to Anne Perry, whose interest in fiction had failed her at last; endlessly, it seemed to Janet Perry, who thought she knew what her old friend and her young lover were going through in that close and time-grimed courtroom; endlessly, it seemed to Dink the Shadow, strange pilgrim in this home of the law and braving the inimical glances of "bulls" in order to be near his master.

The final witnesses for the defense, David Mantell

and Brian Strong himself, described the mounting tensivity of the final scene in Skelly's room, and told of the presence of the two Boscos. Strong had seen no shot fired. He had seen no weapon in any man's hand. Quietly and effectively he described the tableau on which he had looked as he turned from the table in the corner. His testimony as to his interpretation of the expression of the two Bosco faces was objected to, as the defense had realized it would be, but Steinhall's coaching had been so careful that Strong easily got it in.

To Barry the quibbling over this point was an interesting lesson in the law. Strong was not allowed to testify that Tony Bosco looked terror-stricken and that his brother's face expressed a mingling of amazement and horror. He could only describe Tony's livid face and trembling figure, Big Jim's staring eyes and dropped jaw, and let the intelligent jury form its own conclusions as to the meaning of these phenomena. He could tell what he had seen but not the conclusions he himself had drawn from his observations.

Passing back to the chair beside his counsel, Brian Strong wiped his forehead with a hand that shook.

"If I had committed that damned murder," he said to Steinhall, in a voice that reached Barry and Mantell in the first row of spectators behind the railed inclosure that shut in prisoners and lawyers, "I'd deserve all this!"

"Steady, old man!" Mantell said in a low voice.

Strong smiled.

"Steady it is," he said, still as if to Steinhall. "But

the bracing effects of conscious innocence have been greatly exaggerated."

Barry looked from Strong to Mantell. His own hands were shaking, his throat was dry.

"By God!" he thought, "these two are men!"

He himself was merely an exhausted boy; a boy now submerged by the trial and coming up to the surface only at its most critical moments. For weeks a few hours of sleep each night had been filled with nightmares. He saw Strong in the "dance-hall" (the execution chamber), Strong in the "ice-box" (the morgue), but oftenest of all Strong on the "hot seat," as the gambler had, in the vernacular of the underworld, called the electric chair. Even his love for Janet could not dispel the blackness of this period for Barry. The futile struggle he had made against her decision to appear as a witness for the gambler had been merely another nightmare.

It was Steinhall who had made Strong see that there was no dissuading Janet from her course. Barry was glad he himself did not have to go through that interview. The night before giving her testimony Janet had offered her lover another reason for her new stubbornness of purpose.

"Evidently it's dangerous for you to do it," she said, "or you wouldn't have gone two weeks with your ear bandaged and your face all swollen. If there's danger for you, I want to share it."

It was too late to stop her, and of course he couldn't have stopped her, anyway. . . . But what an appalling chance to take! Barry wondered what Strong was dream-

ing of, these nights. Strong always looked so perfectly poised. That one spontaneous outburst after leaving the witness-stand had been his only sign of weakness.

Both lawyers wore themselves out over their summing up. The judge's charge to the jury was dispassionate and logical. It was half-past three in the afternoon when the jury left the court-room, to consider the verdict, and Brian Strong was led to the prison pen to go alone through his ordeal of waiting. He was supposed to have finished with lawyers now, and the great city of New York allows its waiting prisoners no such solace, at this time, as the presence of relatives or friends. Strong went away with his guards.

"Make up your mind to a long discussion in the jury room," Steinhall advised him, with robust assurance and a mighty shake of the hand, just before the cuffs went on in the outer corridor. "Those fellows will take their time to it, but they'll acquit you, all right. Decide what you'll have for supper to-night at the Ritz," he added later, as he hurried away.

Mantell, walking toward the exit of the court-room with Barry, surprised his companion by a sharp intake of breath.

"God!" said Mantell. "Think of what he's going through!"

Young Cabot nodded. He could not speak.

"You know the sort of places the prison pens are, don't you?" Mantell went on when the other shook his head: "There are two of them. One looks out on White Street and the other on Franklin. I heard some one say Strong will be taken to the one on the Franklin

Street side, but I don't suppose the fellow really knew. . . .

"Iron bars divide these rooms into two pens each," he continued, "and the pens are about forty feet long by ten feet wide. There's a central alley between them and two court attendants sit in the alley. There can't be windows in the pens themselves, of course, or prisoners might find some way of escaping through them."

Barry looked at Mantell with surprise. For once the gambler's imperturbability was overthrown. He was talking because he could not stop talking.

"There may be one or two men with Strong, in the pens, waiting for their own verdicts. Sometimes there are several prisoners there at once. But the man who said Strong was to be on the Franklin Street side added that he'd be alone, with the two guards. Wonder how he found out. We can't go near the place and those guards wouldn't tell us anything if we could. Perhaps I can find some attendant in the corridor who won't be so damned close-mouthed. They usually know what's going on."

In after years those hours of waiting for the verdict were the recurrent features of Barry's worst dreams. At first the vigil was not so poignant. He and Mantell found some comfort in the great lawyer's parting words. He had not said, "Decide what you'll have for dinner to-night." He had spoken of supper, a late meal. He thought the jury would take the rest of the afternoon and all evening as well for its deliberations. Or possibly . . . probably . . . his time prediction was a considerate effort to prepare the prisoner for a longer

wait than the lawyer really expected. Better let Strong look for a prolonged vigil and rejoice if it proved to be shorter.

Mantell and Barry went out on Franklin Street for a breath of air. It was a late May afternoon and very warm. Neither of them could remain long in the open. They might miss something, might even be out of reach when the jury returned. By common consent they turned back into the gloomy court-house and there walked up and down the corridors. Barry wondered what Strong's guards were thinking of. Probably of their own affairs. They went through this sort of thing many times a year, and had long since learned to take philosophically the troubles of others. Mantell spoke to a court attendant, hurrying past him.

"What's the prisoner doing down there?" he asked.

"Readin' a newspaper, last I heard." The guard generously added another bit of information as he passed on: "But mostly he walks!"

Mantell and Barry avoided each other's eyes. Both men, knowing Strong's habits, saw the "prowl" in the narrow space behind guarded doors. Plenty of room for prowling there, but Strong had prowled even in his cell, as animals weave in their cages.

The two men talked perfunctorily, with long intervals of silence. They too prowled, as Strong was doing in his lonely pen. Occasionally they stood still and watched the humans hurrying past them. None of Strong's three lawyers was visible. They had found hospitality in the offices of friends. The district attorney had crossed his personal Bridge of Sighs to his

office in the building north of the Criminal Courts. No one dared to be far away. The jury might return at any time. Young men hurried by—lawyers or lawyers' clerks or newspaper men. Most of the latter, however, lounged in the press-room in the building, emerging at intervals to ask a question of some attendant or to take a look at the passing pageant. Around them throbbed the beating pulse of the mighty city. Offices closed and office employees went home. Shadows filled the corners and crept toward the waiting men and women restlessly milling there. A little later, lights flashed on. Mantell reminisced about Strong and his companion was interested. He changed the subject and Barry ceased to hear him.

"Think it would be safe to go out and get a bite?" Mantell asked at last.

"I couldn't swallow anything."

Mantell sighed.

"That goes for me, too, but perhaps we ought to try. Wonder if they've given Brian anything to eat."

Barry didn't know. He didn't know anything about this new world of courts and criminal cases. A stranger near them said he had heard the prisoner had been given his supper and had eaten it all.

"Good old scout!" said Mantell. "He'd do just that."

Mantell talked on, again too nervous for silence. Barry heard the throb of words against his ear-drums but lost their meaning. Fear was enveloping them both like an icy fog.

A stir of excitement brought life into the corridor

again. Men and women were hastening along it, and into the court-room. Mantell stopped a passing attendant.

"Jury's coming in," said the latter without much interest. He explained this by adding: "Don't look like they got a verdict yet. Guess it's just a question."

Mantell and Barry hurried back to their seats. The judge had not yet returned to the bench, but spectators were coming from every direction. The members of the jury filed in, worriedly important. The judge entered, adjusting his robe as he came. Strong, back in the dock with his counsel, turned and smiled at his two friends. His face looked ghastly in the court-room's ineffective light.

The jury, its foreman explained, wanted the degrees of homicide defined. The judge, who had already done this very clearly in his charge to the jury, read patiently but a trifle wearily the section of the penal code defining murder in its various degrees. Spectators exchanged glances eloquent of chagrin and disappointment. Steinhall's eyes, Barry noticed, grew very serious for a moment. The lawyer watched the jury closely as it filed out. The faces of its members were pale and haggard. One man's hair stood violently upright. Another's collar was open and his tie twisted to one side. . . .

"You'll have plenty of time now to run across the street and get something to eat," Steinhall told Mantell as Strong was again shackled and led away.

"What do you think?" Mantell asked huskily. But

Steinhall shook his head. He was not making any predictions. The jury's question had disconcerted him, and he showed it.

"Boy," Mantell said in Barry's ear, "you've got to talk a while. I'm all in. What are you going to do after the trial is over?"

Barry did not see the necessity of it, but he talked.

"The first thing I'm going to do is to marry Miss Perry," he began. "I suppose you know that."

"I suspected it. Congratulations. Charming girl, and she's been a trump to come out for Brian as she did. Going back into banking?" He had not been greatly interested in the engagement.

"My friend, Colonel Jessup, has promised to get me a job in Boston, with a Trust Company he's interested in. He's there a good deal, himself, and he has promised to make his headquarters with us when he comes. I've bought a nice old place Janet picked out, about twenty miles from Boston, and we'll live in it in the summer and in a flat in town during the winter."

Mantell returned to the only subject on which he could keep his mind:

"You've done a lot for Strong, my boy. If he gets off, he'll owe it largely to you. All I could do was to lend him a little money."

Mantell had lent Strong, the listener knew, all he had. If Strong were acquitted, the two gamblers would have to begin a new life, in a new environment. But that would not greatly disturb either of them. They were soldiers of fortune.

Mantell and Barry took another brief turn in the

street, bought some sandwiches, and carried them back to the Criminal Courts building in a paper bag. In the corridors, disgruntled scrub-women sloshed water at their feet and made a few vague passes with wet mops.

"Aw hell! Dose guys'll be out all night," a man remarked in passing them, and his companion retorted hotly, "Betcha dey'll be back inside a hour."

Barry and Mantell munched their sandwiches, which were not bad. Mindful of his companion's appeal, Barry pulled himself together and talked on—of sports, now, because that subject interested his companion at least as much as any other. Since the fight with Tony Bosco, both Mantell and Dink had shown an embarrassing tendency to regard the young man as a sporting authority and a possible ring champion.

"What's become of Dink?" Barry stopped to ask.

"Don't know." Mantell looked around. "Saw him on the White Street side a little while ago. He'll turn up. If Strong doesn't get off," Mantell added dispassionately, "Dink will kill Tony Bosco."

Barry agreed, with equal indifference. He knew that, though no one had put it into words before.

Nine o'clock, ten o'clock, eleven o'clock. The corridors were stifling. Both men were looking at their watches at short intervals. Mantell was bucking up, plainly feeling that the ordeal was almost over. Barry felt himself near collapse. He wanted Janet—no, not Janet. Least of all Janet, here and now. What he wanted, strongly and deeply, was Marcia Cabot. The mere thought of Marcia Cabot strengthened his soul; but his legs were wabbling.

"Some of them are making a damned good fight for Brian," Mantell exulted.

Then at last a rush down the corridor and the excited face of an attendant. Ignoring their quick stride toward him, he spoke to a fellow-guard:

"Jury's comin' up again. Seems like they got a verdict', this time."

Barry gulped. He was only a boy, needing Marcia Cabot. . . . Mantell slipped an arm through his and swept him into the court-room. . . .

Barry was never quite sure just what happened from that time until the jury and the prisoner stood face to face. He was vaguely conscious of the rush of spectators into the court-room, of the scramble for seats, of the subdued voice of the clerk of the court, of the judge, of a sudden and absolute silence that settled over the crowded room, of a voice cutting into the utter stillness.

"Look upon . . . do you find this man guilty . . .

"Not guilty."

Then a roar, a forward surge of massed and excited human beings, the fierce pounding of a gavel.

Not guilty!

Brian Strong, with hands in those of Steinhall and Mantell, was nodding over their shoulders at Barry.

"Steady's the word, old chap." He smiled, looking at the boy's twitching features.

CHAPTER XVII

J. C. BLEECKER PASSES

THREE months later, seated on an old stone bench in the walled garden of their new Massachusetts home, Barry Cabot turned to his wife, wiped her eyes, and resolutely addressed her.

"And now you've really got to stop crying, my darling," he told her. "After all, you know, it isn't as if you had known your father."

Young Mrs. Cabot permitted her eyes to be wiped, and made an effort to be calm.

"The news came so suddenly," she said, looking at the yellow message that lay between them. "What I'm really crying about, Barry," she went on after a short silence, "is because I'm not as unhappy over my father's death as I ought to be. But it breaks the last of my old ties. When Mr. Haven . . . Mr. Strong, I mean . . . went to Europe, I realized from his manner that we'd see no more of him. Now that Aunt Anne is happy in her own home and my father is dead, I feel as if all my old life had fallen away from me. That's a queer, sickening, lonesome feeling, Barry."

"I know it is." Her husband slipped an arm around her and drew her close to his side. "But after all," he pointed out, "we're starting a brand-new life and a

pretty good one, and we're starting it together. That's something, isn't it?"

"That's everything."

Janet Cabot spoke with a little catch in her breath, like that of a child whose spasm of grief is over.



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